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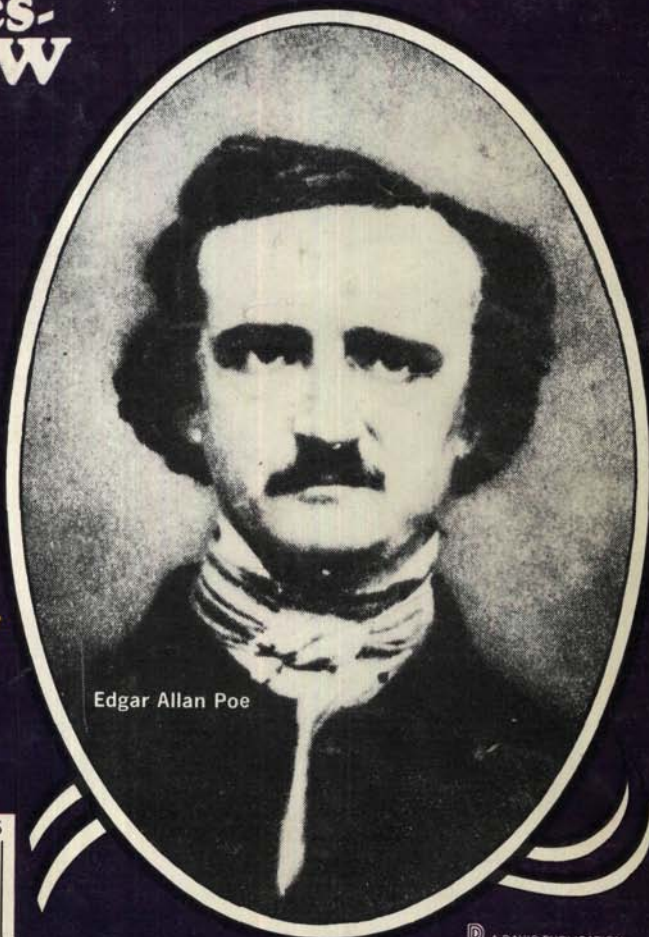
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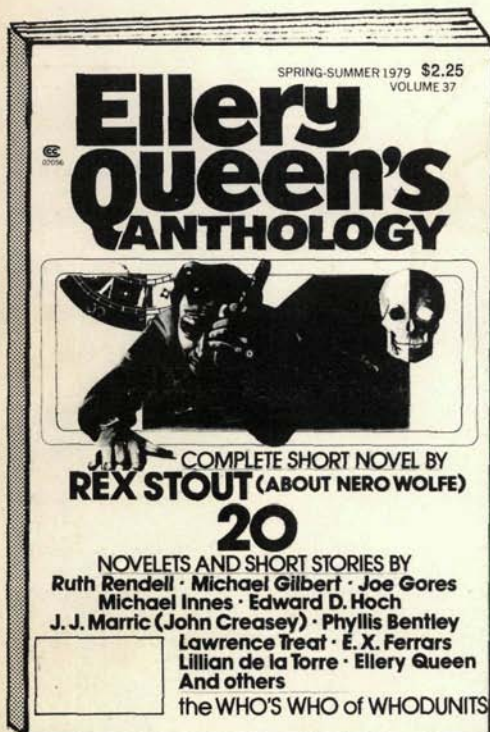


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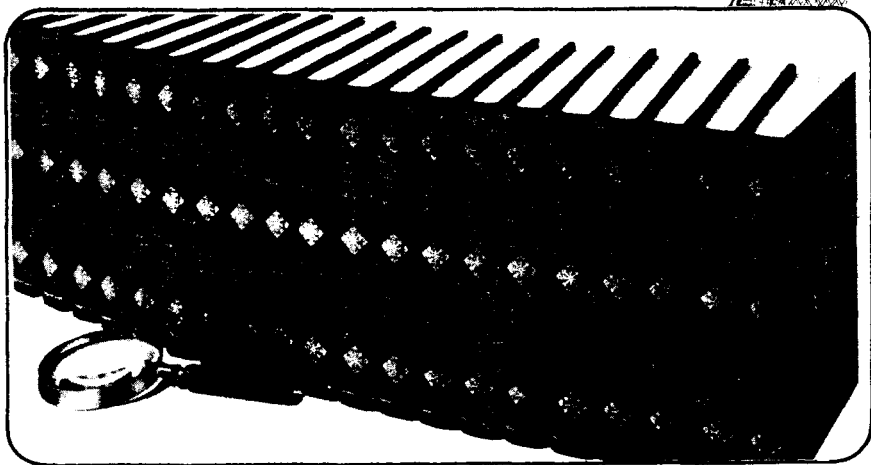
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THE MAN IN THE MIDDLE

by **MICHAEL GILBERT**

66 **I**f you try that again," said Mercer, "I'll break your arm."
"I tell you, I wish to speak to Mr. Rowe."

"And I tell you that he does not wish to speak to you."

"You treat us like children," said Bapu Ram. He was a tall Pakistani with a Groucho Marx mustache.

"If you behave like children," said Mercer reasonably, "you must expect to be treated like children."

Bapu Ram paused at the doorway of Mercer's office and said, "You may discover, Mr. Mercer, that children possess sometimes the facility to surprise those who consider themselves to be their elders and betters."

Mercer grinned and said, "You ought to set that to music. Don't slam the door, I've got a nasty headache."

He set to work again on a chart which he was compiling. It had the names of six ships written down the left-hand side—the *Tamar*, the *Dart*, the *Exe*, the *Teign*, the *Taw*, and the *Torrige*. Vertical columns to the right were headed: Cabin Stores, Crew Stores, Engine Room, and General Stores. Mercer was using four different colored pencils and was achieving rather an agreeable color scheme.

The inner door opened and Arnold Rowe came out. Although it was only ten o'clock in the morning he was halfway through his second cigar of the day.

© 1979 by Michael Gilbert.

He said, "You having some trouble?"

"It was Bapu Ram."

"That bolshy blighter. What did he want?"

"He wanted to know why we were switching him from the *Tamar* to the *Dart*. He said all his friends were on the *Tamar*."

"And what did you tell him?"

"Since I didn't know myself, the only thing I could tell him was to do what he was told and be thankful he had a job at all, with one and a half million unemployed. As a matter of fact, it did seem a bit odd."

"Ours not to reason why," said Rowe. "I have my instructions from Mr. Henderson, just as you have yours from me. You're doing an excellent job, my boy." He seemed to be about to pat Mercer on the shoulder, then thought better of it.

"All the same," said Mercer, "we might be in for trouble."

"Trouble?" Rowe looked up sharply. His large and generously contoured face had lost some of its color. "What sort of trouble?"

"Union trouble," said Mercer. "And if anyone does start anything in that line I don't mind betting it'll be Bapu Ram. He's a born shop steward, that boy."

"Oh. Union trouble," said Rowe. "We can deal with that." The color had come back into his face. "We have so many staunch friends to help us inside and outside our organization."

"I've got to see a solicitor."

Rowe looked at him in some surprise.

"You reminded me. Talking about trouble and friends who could help us. I'm having trouble. With my landlady."

Rowe laughed, swallowed some cigar smoke, coughed, and laughed again.

"You are an extraordinary chap," he said. "I've noticed it before. When you seem to be talking about one thing, I find you are talking about something quite different."

"I've got a devious mind," agreed Mercer. "I noticed a board up in the High Street. S. Klerk and Company. They're solicitors, aren't they?"

"They are indeed. And if Syd Klerk can't find a way through the law, he'll find a way round it. What sort of trouble are you having?"

"Our landlady is trying to turn us out. She's a highly moral woman. She suspects that Shallini and I are not man and wife."

"That's surely no reason for terminating your tenancy?"

"Ah," said Mercer, "you say that because you live north of the river. Up there anything goes. The permissive society hasn't got down to these parts yet."

It was more than a mile from the offices and store of Arnold Rowe and Company (Ships' Chandlers & Marine Contractors) on Lower Creek Street to Mercer's flat in Lower Greenwich. He usually kept his car in a lean-to in the yard behind the store and made the journeys to and fro on foot. A cheerful June sun was warming the streets, with their summer smell of tar and exhaust fumes, mixed with a salty tang from the river. In the ten months he had been there, Mercer had become an accepted figure in the community. He did his evening drinking at the China Clipper or the Duke of Albemarle and took his midday meal at the café at the corner of Lower Creek Street, where he was on nodding terms with most of the Indians and Pakistanis who had turned it into an unofficial club.

A sound obtruded itself. In the street ahead someone was playing, and playing well, on a cornet. As he turned the corner a big drum took up the rhythm and there was a scatter of applause.

Mercer saw a little group in Salvation Army uniforms clustered round the cornet player, a huge man with a long black beard. He wondered how he kept it from getting entangled with the stops. It was a meeting rather than a service. A young man in glasses was handing round leaflets and he was followed by a girl with a collecting box.

Most of the spectators put something in. As the girl came up to Mercer he felt in his pocket for a coin. He was aware of the work which the dedicated, cheerful men and women in their curious Victorian uniforms carried out among the dwellers in that part of London.

He put a 50p piece into the box and was rewarded with a smile. He thought that she was an unusually pretty girl. Hardly a girl. In the second half of her twenties, perhaps. And come to think of it, pretty was the wrong word. She had cool and unfussy good looks.

He smiled back at her.

When he got home he found Shallini setting out the supper things. He put one arm round her waist, lifted her an inch clear of the ground, and kissed her.

"Great brute," she said. "Leave me alone. I will drop this plate."

"Get another one," said Mercer, and kissed her again.

"What has made you so happy?"

"I've been listening to a concert. In the street."

"The Salvation Army, you mean? Yes, they are good people."

"Has the old battleax been at us again?"

"Mrs. Mainprice. Yes. She stopped me on the stairs this afternoon and asked me when we were leaving. I said we were not leaving and would have the law on her."

"That's the spirit," said Mercer.

Later, over supper, he said, "You have a lot of friends in these parts, Shallini. Quite a few of them work for Rowe, or have been found jobs by the Employment Agency next door which he operates. Have you heard any talk of trouble?"

"What sort of trouble?"

"A strike. Something like that."

Shallini thought about it. She said, "Mostly they are afraid of Mr. Rowe, but if someone would take the lead—yes, I think they might have trouble."

"Someone like Bapu Ram?"

"Someone of that sort. Or his brother Khalid."

Mercer looked at the calendar on the wall. June 6th. He said, "If trouble is coming, I hope it comes quickly."

His wish was granted. It arrived the very next morning, in the shape of Tom Hobhouse, a square pugnacious Yorkshire terrier. He was shown into Rowe's office and Mercer, who had rarely set foot in this inner sanctum since he joined the firm, was called in to help in what was clearly going to be an unpleasant encounter.

"Mr. Hobhouse," said Rowe, indicating him with a sweep of his cigar which left a fragrant trail of smoke behind it, "tells me that he is what is known as a Union Coordinator. I had no idea that such an office existed, but if he says it does, I suppose we must believe him."

"You'll find it exists all right," said Mr. Hobhouse.

"And might I be so bold as to inquire precisely which Unions you—er—coordinate?"

"I chair a Joint Committee of the Local Representatives of the Dockers, the Stevedores, and Sailors Unions. We hold a watching brief for the Transport and General and Professional Staffs."

"But since none of my employees, or the men and women for whom I find jobs, are dockers and stevedores or sailors, I fail to see what business they are of yours. You'll forgive me speaking bluntly, I'm sure."

"I don't mind blunt speaking," said Mr. Hobhouse. "If your people want to join a Union I'll find one to suit 'em quick enough."

"But suppose they don't want to?"

"There's one way of finding out. Ask 'em."

"Oh, I have. Many times. Have I not, Mr. Mercer?"

Mercer nodded. He had been sitting quietly, withdrawn from the dispute, watching the disputants. Arnold Rowe, large, florid, and loquacious. Tom Hobhouse, chunky and taciturn. He knew which one would back down if it came to a fight.

"When I ask them and explain to them the advantages of unionization, which seems to comprise paying away part of their salaries in order to support union officials—and coordinators—they do not appear to be very interested in the idea."

"It's not you who should talk to 'em. It's me."

"You mean summon a meeting of all my people for you to address?"

"Yes."

"I fear I could hardly countenance such an interruption of their working hours. They are all very busy people."

"Then let me have a list of their names and home addresses so that we can circularize them."

"It would be a total waste of time. Many of them speak very little English. They could hardly be expected to understand union dialectics."

"We've talked to one or two already. The impression we've got is that you're taking advantage of the fact that they're foreign to overwork 'em and underpay 'em."

"Perhaps you could let me know the names of the people you have talked to, who express this opinion?"

"Certainly not."

"I see. Then all we have to go on is the opinion of witnesses you are not prepared to produce. I don't think we can take the matter any further, do you?"

Tom Hobhouse said nothing.

"In two of the Unions which you—er—coordinate, you have, I am aware, a closed shop; which you have obtained through the servility of a weak-kneed crowd of politicians who ought to be ashamed to call themselves a government. Fortunately, in our case, we have not yet come under that hammer, so—"

Tom Hobhouse rose and stomped out without another word.

"Dear me," said Rowe. "I seem to have annoyed the gentleman."

When he got home, Mercer reported this conversation to Shalini who said, "I have been speaking to some of our people. There will certainly be trouble. Bapu, Khalid, and three others are seeing Mr. Rowe this evening. They are demanding the right to join a Union."

"What will Rowe say to that?"

"It is thought he will make it an excuse to dismiss them."

"He's stupid enough to do that," agreed Mercer. "Let's not worry about him, love. Let's worry about ourselves. I'm going to see that lawyer first thing tomorrow."

His appointment was for ten o'clock. S. Klerk & Co., Solicitors and Commissioners for Oaths, occupied modest premises on the first and second floors of a building in Deptford High Street. Sydney Klerk had gray hair, dressed down into sideburns, a superb set of false teeth, and glasses in rectangular frames.

He said, "Well, what's the trouble now?"

When Mercer was halfway through explaining what his troubles were, Mr. Klerk pressed the bell on his desk twice and a girl with a plain face and a very bad cold came into the room.

Mr. Klerk said, "My articulated clerk. She knows much more about the law than I do. Start at the beginning again."

Mercer started at the beginning and was allowed, this time, to complete his story. The girl blew her nose and said, "Gidgin and bathroom?"

"I beg your pardon?"

Mr. Klerk interpreted. "Has the flat got its own kitchen and bathroom?"

"Oh, certainly."

"Unfurnished letting?"

"All the furniture belongs to us, yes."

"Then your landlady is mad. She certainly can't turn you out."

"What do I do if she tries?"

"Tell her you are applying to the Dribunal to fix a fair rent. I don't suppose you'll have any more trouble."

"And if I do have any more trouble?"

"Send for the Bolice."

The girl departed and Mercer said, "Well, that seems to wrap that up. How much do I owe you?"

Mr. Klerk looked at his watch and made a scribbled calculation. "Eleven minutes of my time, four of my articulated clerk's. That's

nine pounds sixty inclusive of VAT."

Mercer produced a ten-pound note and was given four tenpenny pieces in return. Mr. Klerk said, "Is there anything more I can do for you?"

"Not just at this moment. But I may have some inquiries I want made. Can you undertake that sort of work?"

"If I can't do it myself, I can always find a reliable inquiry agent, or if it's a straightforward matter I can send my articulated clerk."

"She certainly seemed to know her stuff," said Mercer.

"She's a good girl," said Mr. Klerk. He looked at his watch again and Mercer wondered whether he was going to be charged an additional fee for these closing exchanges. However, all Mr. Klerk said was, "Got to go now. Due in the Police Court at half-past ten."

Mercer walked back to Lower Creek Street. As he turned into the end of the street he became aware that things were happening. A crowd was standing about round the main entrance to Arnold Rowe's office. He could see Bapu Ram and his brother Khalid and three or four others whom he recognized. They had a dozen supporters with them, mostly young. A girl was carrying a banner which had a well-executed picture on it. A fat man, smoking a cigar, was riding on the shoulders of a worker and flourishing a whip in the air. The legend underneath in red letters said: *ROT-TEN ROWE*.

When the crowd saw Mercer they embarked on an uncoordinated plain-song chant. The words, as far as he could make them out, were: "A fair wage for a fair day's work." Mercer grinned amiably and made his way through the crowd. No one made any effort to stop him.

He walked straight through into Rowe's office and found him finishing a telephone call. He said, "What are you going to do about that little lot?"

"I've been speaking to the police. I asked them to send a van and half a dozen policemen so that they could arrest the ringleaders. Do you know what they said?" His jowls were quivering with agitation and rage. "They said, as soon as they could spare him, they would send round a policeman to keep observation. And it's no laughing matter, Mercer."

"Sorry," said Mercer. "It was that picture of you. I thought it was lovely. If I was you I'd buy it off them and have it framed."

That morning a conference took place in Superintendent Browning's office. There were two other men present. One was Detective Chief Superintendent Whyman, the C.I.D. head of Number 1 District. The other was his predecessor in that particular job, Chief Superintendent Morrissey, now in charge of the six Special Crime Squads which operated in the Metropolitan area.

"What beats me," said Browning, "is why I'm supposed to use my men, who are overworked as it is, to provide protection for an outfit I'd give a good deal to see closed down altogether. It's not reasonable."

Whyman said, "When you talk about an outfit, do you mean Rowe and Company or the Employment Agency next door?"

"I mean both of them. They've got separate entrances, but I'm damn sure they're run by the same people."

"And why do you think they ought to be closed down? We haven't had any adverse reports on them from you until quite recently."

"That's correct. I used to think they were on the level. And they did a lot of good work, finding jobs for immigrant workers. And I like Arnold Rowe. He's a Councillor and a solid citizen."

"What made you change your mind?"

Browning thought for an unusually long time before he answered. He was an honest man, according to his lights, and he was being asked a difficult question. In the end he said, "It's Mercer. The new man there. I've an idea he's gradually taking the place over. And I happen to know he's a crook."

Morrissey grunted. He was leafing through a folder he had in front of him.

"I warned Rowe. And I warned his number two, a man called Parker, who *was* straight. Too straight for Mercer. He got rid of him."

"How?"

"We've no idea what happened to Parker. He just vanished."

"All right," said Whyman. "So Mercer's bent. He's taking over Arnold Rowe's setup. The idea, I gather from your last report, is that he's got some hold over these Paks and Indians and could be using them as couriers, to transport stolen items abroad for sale on the Continent."

"Your report went a lot further than that," said Morrissey. "It suggested that these people had been brought into this country illegally. If their employer knew about it, that would give him all

the hold he needed, wouldn't it?"

"I've got no proof," said Browning. "Their papers seem to be in order."

"Which suggests," said Whyman, "that there's a larger organization behind this one, able to produce forged papers."

"Let's get down to cases," said Morrissey. His nose was again in his file. "When you began to think these chaps might be couriers, you organized some snap checks, right?"

"We've run three very thorough checks covering the crew and cabin staff of a different boat each time. It didn't make us very popular with the Unions."

"And the checks flopped?"

"That's right."

"Any reason why?"

"I suppose we picked the wrong ship or the wrong moment."

"There is another explanation, isn't there?" said Morrissey.

A slow flush spread across Browning's face. He said, without any attempt at politeness, "Meaning what?"

"Meaning a leak."

"If you're implying that any of my men here are capable of dirtying their fingers, I'd like names and definite accusations."

"Don't blow your top, Bull," said Morrissey calmly. Browning normally discouraged the use of the nickname which he had earned as a constable on the beat, but tolerated it from Morrissey, who was more than 200 pounds of fighting policeman, still as formidable as when he had climbed into the ring to win the heavyweight championship of the Metropolitan Force.

"You've got six hundred coppers in this Division alone, so you can't be expected to know them all. What we want are the names of the ones, uniform or plainclothes, who were concerned in or knew about the three searches you just mentioned. That'll do for a start."

"Is that an order?"

"That's an order," said Whyman.

"Then I'll do it, under protest."

"That's right," said Morrissey. "You protest. But you know as well as I do that when A10 gets an idea into its noodle there's nothing anyone can do about it. They could investigate you, me, or the Commissioner himself."

"All right," said Browning. "But can I say this? What we need down here is help, not criticism and investigation. If this racket is

as big as you make it out to be, all we've got down here is the tail. The head's somewhere up West—the people who actually receive the stolen goods and arrange the sales abroad. People who can organize forged papers. *They're* the ones you ought to be going after. In fact, I thought that was just the sort of job your Squads were organized to do."

He did not bother to keep out of his voice the hostility which the regular Police Force felt for the Special Squads, with their special facilities and privileges.

Morrissey said good-naturedly, "I'll keep it in mind, Bull."

The Public Bar of the Duke of Albemarle was always crowded on Saturday nights. It was a favorite drinking place for dockers, sailors on shore leave, and the miscellaneous types who picked up a living along the waterfront. The police regarded it as a rough house, but had never had any definite cause for complaint. This may have been due to the fact that the landlord had once been a professional wrestler and had two sons nearly as large as himself.

From his position behind the bar the landlord regarded, with some misgiving, the appearance of a girl in Salvation Army uniform carrying copies of their official publication, "The War Cry." He need not have worried. The drinkers were in a state of alcoholic good humor and many of them paid for copies which they had clearly no intention of reading.

There was one group in the corner who had been sitting by themselves. The landlord knew them by name—Loveridge, Manson, and Banks. They were members of a nasty crowd from farther West, in the Southwark area, and he wondered what they were doing in this district.

He was glad to see that the girl intended to bypass them; but they must have noticed her. She was a remarkably good-looking girl. As she went past the corner table, Banks gave a wolf whistle and stretched out a hand as if asking for a copy of the paper. She ignored him and continued on her way round the room.

When she reached the door and went out, the landlord saw Banks rise to his feet, say something to his companions, who laughed, then make his way toward the door. He was a heavy man, his white face pocked with scars, long arms swinging from a pair of hefty shoulders. As he plowed through the crowd of drinkers he trod on a few toes, but no one seemed inclined to object. The landlord wondered if he ought to do something about it, but

decided that it was none of his business.

Outside in the street Banks spotted the girl walking briskly off down the pavement and started after her. When she heard him coming she stopped under a lamppost and looked round. She did not seem alarmed.

Banks, breathing heavily, said, "You like to help me win a bet?"

"It depends on the bet," said the girl.

"I got a bet with my friends there that for all your prissy uniform you were the sort of girl who wouldn't say no to giving me a kiss."

"Kiss *you*?" said the girl. "I'd as soon kiss the exhaust pipe on a lorry."

"Okay. If you want to play hard to get, that suits me too." He grabbed the front of her uniform jacket.

"It doesn't suit me," said Mercer.

Banks swung round. Mercer was standing just behind him. He said, "You can bug off."

Mercer said, "Surely you can't mean that. After all, we're old friends, aren't we? I'm *sure* you didn't mean it. Shake hands and we'll forget all about it."

He held out his right hand. Banks stared at it stupidly. Mercer straightened his arm so that the thumb and four fingers rested lightly on Banks' chest. Then the heel of his hand snapped down, with all the force and leverage of his fingers behind it. Banks uttered a sound which was halfway between a scream and a gasp, went down onto his knees, and folded slowly forward onto the pavement.

Mercer said to the girl, "The trouble with that little trick is that it can kill people. I wouldn't want to be responsible for finishing off even a creature like Banks. Lend a hand."

He had got hold of Banks by the coat collar. Together they lifted him until he was sitting, with his head forward. "Now we have to rock him," said Mercer. "Rather like—starting a car—when the starter's—jammed."

On the last word Banks gave a strangled grunt and threw up with projectile force onto the pavement.

"That's fine," said Mercer. "He'll be all right now. I'd better take you home."

The girl looked for a moment as though she was going to be sick herself, then said, "No. I'll be all right now."

"They all say that," said Mercer. "And they never are. Come on."

"All right," said the girl. "Home's only a few streets away."

It turned out to be two rooms on the second floor of a small house in Batsford Gardens. Brushing aside her protests, Mercer marched up with her. He said, "I'm widely known as a trustworthy man, where girls are concerned. I'll put on the kettle. A cup of tea will do you good."

It was a typical bachelor-girl pad. One room for sleeping and eating and two large closets, one converted into a tiny bathroom, the other into an even tinier kitchen.

"I was certainly glad to see you just now," said the girl. She seemed to have recovered most of her self-possession. "It was rather a shock. Most of the men round here are terribly decent."

Public school education, thought Mercer.

He said, "First, Banks doesn't belong round here. Second, he's not a nice character at all. Professional bully. On sale to the man with the largest purse."

Over a cup of tea Mercer said, "I imagine I'm not the first person who's said this to you, so don't take it as the opening move in a seduction scene, but what is a girl with your looks and class, Miss Ford, doing in a job like this?"

"How did you—?"

"How did I know your name? No magic about it. I saw it on a card under the bell push downstairs. I'm Mercer. My friends call me Bill."

"I blush every time I admit it," said the girl. "But my name's Millicent. And I can't stop people from calling me Millie."

"It's a nice old-fashioned name. And you still haven't answered my question."

"It's a short, sad, simple story. Father, Rector of Christchurch. Died when I was eighteen. Mother paid for me to take a Teacher Training Course at Bristol. No grant, of course, because she had money of her own. My first job was at a posh school. I daren't tell you the name. I hated it. The girls were all like fat little pigs. Then Mummy died. That meant I had enough money to live on. I had a gorgeous row with the headmistress and came up to London to train to be a Probation Officer. The Salvation Army work was my idea. It's a useful way of getting to know people. Now it's your turn."

"Compared with you," said Mercer, "I've had a very uninspiring

life. Mostly it's been a chase after money. Sometimes I catch up with it. Then it gets away again. And I'm afraid I'll have to go the moment I've finished this tea, or the old lady on the ground floor who spotted us coming in will be getting ideas."

Mercer walked back to the Duke of Albemarle. There was no sign of Banks, or his two friends. He had a final drink and went home to bed.

During the ensuing week the pickets at Arnold Rowe's establishment grew more numerous and noisier. They were joined by small contingents from other Unions. Rowe himself never got through without booing and some jostling. Mercer the pickets seemed to ignore.

Rowe said, "I'm not standing for much more of this. They've even started sticking placards on my car. If the police won't control them, I'm going to have to do something about it myself."

"I don't see you can do a lot," said Mercer.

"Don't you?" said Rowe. "Just you wait." There were angry red patches in his pasty cheeks. A lot of the robust good humor had oozed out of him, leaving something uglier in its place.

Mercer thought, "He'll blow up soon."

After lunch Mercer called for a second time, by appointment, on Syd Klerk. As soon as they were alone together, Mercer said, "I mentioned a couple of inquiries I wanted you to make. The first might be a bit tricky."

"Not illegal, I hope."

"Not exactly illegal. You might have to cut a few corners. I've got my eye on a small house. Number 23 Swains Lane, Charlton."

"Swains Lane. At the bottom of the hill up to Blackheath. Quite a desirable residential quarter."

"I'm not buying it. All I want to know is whether there's a mortgage on it. And whether part or all of the mortgage has been paid off in the last year or so."

Mr. Klerk said, "Hmmm." He took off and polished his rectangular glasses, then he said, "The first bit might not be too difficult. Swains Lane was part of the Bundy Estate. It was developed as a single unit after the war. That means that there's one title number for the whole area. At each sale off, the new title number would be noted on the main title—if you follow me."

"I think so," said Mercer. "And if you can find the title number of the house at Number 23 you can tell if there's a mortgage. And

that would give you the name of the mortgagee."

"Yes. Probably a Building Society or Insurance Company. But the next part's a lot more difficult. The only person who would have access, in the normal way, to the record of repayments would be the borrower himself."

"If it's an Insurance Company," said Mercer, "I might be able to put you onto a man who's helped me before." He scribbled a name and telephone number on a piece of paper and pushed it across the desk. "Now, there's a second lot of inquiries. They're quite routine. Mostly a matter of looking up records. You'll probably have to employ an Inquiry Agent. I'd better give you something in advance. Would twenty-five be a good idea?"

"Twenty-five would be an excellent idea," said Mr. Klerk happily.

Mercer had one or two other jobs to do and it was nearly six o'clock by the time he got back to the office. Arnold Rowe was getting ready to leave.

"I've taken to wearing a bowler hat," he said. "It'll be some protection when they start throwing bottles."

It was bravely said, but as he adjusted the hat at a defiant angle, Mercer noticed his hand shaking slightly.

Mercer said, "I hope it won't come to that."

At seven o'clock the old age pensioner who locked up the office made his rounds. Mercer's room was empty. He collected a few late letters for the post, turned out the electricity at the main, and went out to lock up the front door. The pickets, who were themselves getting ready to pack up, greeted him with shouts of "Grandad," and sang a verse of Old Lang Syne. By half-past seven the street was quiet.

Two hours later Mercer came out of the lavatory where he had been sitting and made his way back to his own room. From the locked drawer in his desk he extracted a number of items including a long coil of wire, several insulated two-pronged pins, and a telephonist's handset. He then attacked the lock on the inner door leading to Arnold Rowe's private office. He had a small shaded torch, but since there were no curtains on his window and the window gave directly onto the street, he had to use it with caution.

It took him ten minutes to open the inner door. Once it was shut behind him he was able to use his torch more freely. He set to work dismantling and reassembling the G.P.O. telephone on

Rowe's desk. When he had finished there was no visible sign that the instrument had been tampered with. The only addition was a single thin black wire which ran from the telephone junction box down on the wainscoting and disappeared through a small hole at the far end. It would have needed close inspection to spot it.

After relocking the door, Mercer sat down at his own desk, propped up his torch so that it shone away from the window, and set to work on his own telephone. The light was so dim that he had to work largely by touch. It was eleven o'clock before he finished. He let himself quietly out the front door, using his own key to open and relock it.

Other people were busy that evening.

The offices of Tom Hobhouse, Union Coordinator, were on the first floor of a building in a quiet side street off Mears Road. The other floors were occupied by surveyors, accountants, and insurance agents, and the building boasted a resident caretaker, an old man named Salter, who lived in the basement with an imbecile granddaughter. At eight o'clock that evening the bell of the street door sounded. Salter ignored it, on principle, for the first two minutes. When it continued to sound he climbed the stairs grumbling and opened the door.

His first impression was that the three men outside had no faces. Then he realized that they were wearing silk-stockings masks. His next impressions were uncomfortable. Two of the men picked him up and trundled him downstairs to the basement. The third had preceded them and was looking at the granddaughter, who was slobbering excitedly. Salter got enough breath back to say, "Don't you touch her. She's not all there. You'll be in dead trouble if you touch her."

"That's all right, Grandad," said the leader. "We've got nothing against you or her. Just you keep her quiet. Otherwise we'll have to tie you up and gag you."

The granddaughter was pointing at their masks and giggling. "She thinks it's a game," said the second man. "That's all it is, lovely. Only we haven't got time to play with you tonight."

They went out and locked the door. Salter sat down to get his breath back. He heard occasional thuds and crashes from above, as though the occupants of one of the offices was dropping things on the floor. None of this worried him. He wasn't paid to be a guard. And, anyway, three to one! Let 'em get clear, then he'd ring up the police. . .

"You did *what*?" said Mercer incredulously.

"I wasn't going to let them have it all their own way," said Arnold Rowe. "Give 'em a taste of their own medicine."

"You sent round three men to wreck Hobhouse's office?"

"Right. And they made a thorough job of it."

Tom Hobhouse, who had been summoned to the building by the police at eleven o'clock the night before, would have agreed with him. Typewriters had been smashed, filing cabinets broken open, all his papers strewn about, with the contents of two or three ink bottles emptied onto them.

Mercer said, "Right. If that's the way they want to play it."

First thing next morning he telephoned the Secretaries of three Unions. By that evening they had massive support out in Lower Creek Street. When Rowe tried to leave he was manhandled and it took a heavy reinforcement of police to get him out safely. When he reached home, a service flat in an expensive block behind Theobald's Row, he poured out and drank half a tumbler of brandy. He was contemplating a refill when the telephone rang. With a sinking feeling he recognized the voice of Bobby, who was Mr. Henderson's chauffeur and performed a number of other duties as well.

Bobby said, "You're to come right over, Arnold. And I should advise you to wear your thickest pair of pants. Because you're in for a caning."

Mr. Henderson, tall, thin, gray-mustached, was standing rigidly upright in front of the fireplace in his beautiful drawing room. He looked not unlike a headmaster dealing with an erring schoolboy. He did not invite Rowe to sit down.

He said, "Do I understand that it was on your instructions that three of my men went round and wrecked that Union man's office?"

Rowe managed to gulp, "Yes."

"I hope you realize what you've done. If you had gone out of your way to attract publicity you could not have done it more effectively. You have made it impossible for me to use the organization, which I have been at great trouble and expense to establish, for several months at least. And that at a time when I had a number of extremely valuable cargoes which I was preparing to run."

"I didn't know. If I had known, perhaps—"

Mr. Henderson ignored him. He said, "I have, of course, been

forced to buy those cargoes. The people I deal with don't give tick. The net result of your incredible stupidity is that I am out of pocket several thousand pounds. I don't like that. I look to you to clear up the mess you've made."

"How—?"

"That I shall leave to you. I hope you will be successful."

The impersonal coldness in his voice reminded Rowe of a judge pronouncing sentence.

Some evenings later, when Millicent Ford came home from a Salvation Army Concert at which she had been allowed to play a side drum, she found Mercer sitting in her room.

He got up as she came in and said, "I've got a lot to tell you and there isn't much time, so we'll consider you excused from all the usual opening remarks when you find a man in your bedroom. Sit down and take your coat off. It must be very heavy in this warm weather. That's better."

"What—?"

"Give me the floor for a few minutes. About a week ago, in a mood of reminiscence which you may later have regretted, you supplied me with a number of facts about your family and yourself. They were none of them true. Neither of the last two Rectors of Christchurch was named Ford and in any event one of them was unmarried and the other was a widower. The records of the Teacher Training College at Bristol contains no Millicent Ford. Inquiries were made for you, by an anxious relative, with the Probationary Service Training Department. They were equally unfruitful. I deduced from all this that you were not quite what you seem."

"So?" said Millicent. She seemed to have recovered her composure.

"So, after rejecting a number of other unlikely solutions, I came to the conclusion that you'd been put in by A10 to make a preliminary assessment of the position. That's the way they usually work, although the idea of using a woman officer is a novel one. Three days ago you got an anonymous letter advising you that a certain Detective Sergeant Russ, attached to Superintendent Browning's Divisional Headquarters Station, was receiving bribes to give advance information of intended police raids. It's no use denying it, because I sent the letter myself. Russ was a fairly obvious candidate anyway. Old and soured by lack of promotion,

with an expensive wife, two children, and a heavily mortgaged house, Number 23 Swains Lane, Charlton. When I say heavily mortgaged, it *was* heavily mortgaged. Not any longer. Most of the mortgage has been paid off in lump sums of £250 over the past two years. £3,000 altogether. Significant, don't you agree?"

The girl nodded. She had started scribbling notes.

"As soon as you got the tipoff I take it you had him followed?"

"Naturally."

"Then you can tell me from your records whether he made calls from a public 'phone box at two thirty on Tuesday and at five thirty on Wednesday."

"I believe that's correct. I'll have to check."

"I hope it is. Because I can give you tape recordings taken at the receiving end, in Arnold Rowe's office. If the times coincide, I think that should tie the case up, shouldn't it?"

"Why are you doing this?"

"I told you the answer once, but you didn't seem to believe it. I do nothing unless I can see some cash at the end of the corridor. I'm going to give you these tapes on one condition."

"I don't know that I can bargain—"

"It's a very simple condition. You're to let it be known—I don't care how you do it as long as it *gets* known—that you got onto Russ *through some indiscretion by Arnold Rowe*. Something he said to someone who passed it on to someone else. Can you do that?"

"I expect so. Yes. But what—?"

"A word of advice. Tie the whole thing up and get out quick. There's going to be trouble in this part of the world quite soon—not the sort of trouble I'd care to see a nice girl like you getting involved in, police training or no police training."

When Mercer got to the office on the following morning, the number of people on picket duty seemed to have doubled; the number of policemen also. He found the rest of the staff still in reasonably good spirits. This was probably because the fury of the pickets seemed to be directed, with personal venom, against Rowe himself. He listened to the chants of "Rotten Rowe—Rotten Rowe—Rotten Rowe," and thought, "He'll break soon; I wonder he's stood it so long."

At that moment the click of his own telephone told him that Rowe was putting through a call on his outside line. Mercer lifted the receiver of his own instrument and listened. He waited until

Rowe had finished speaking before replacing his own receiver. Then he lay back in his chair and gave himself over to contemplation of a patch of blue sky which was visible over the roof of the building opposite. He remained so without moving for some minutes. A close observer might have been disturbed by the look on his face.

Finally he heaved himself up onto his feet and made his way out of the building, through the crowd—the pickets seemed more pleased to see him than the policemen—and round the corner at the end of the street. Thereafter he walked fast, doubling back more than once on his tracks, ending up at a telephone booth about half a mile from the office. From there he put through a call to a number in the Victoria district.

Arnold Rowe left the office at half-past four. This unusual maneuver caught the pickets unaware and he got through the crowd almost unscathed. At the very last moment a burly docker recognized him, swung his fist, and shouted, "We'll get you!"

A camera clicked.

Rowe dodged the blow and got away escorted by two bored-looking policemen. At the corner of the street he thanked them with unusual warmth and was lucky enough to pick up a cruising taxi which took him back to Theobald's Row.

He had a lot to do and not much time to do it in.

The airplane tickets which he had ordered by telephone that morning had arrived. He checked them and stowed them away in his wallet together with the money and travelers checks. He tried to make a telephone call to a bank in Lausanne and learned that there would be a thirty-minute delay. Then he sent for the manager of the service flats, who arrived promptly. Arnold Rowe was a long-standing and favored tenant.

Rowe said, "It's an awful nuisance. I have to go to the Continent on business. Almost at a moment's notice."

The manager smiled sympathetically.

"Since I've no idea how long I'll be away, I'd better give you a check for next month's rent and service charge. Perhaps you could take this opportunity of having the curtains and carpets cleaned. They're getting a bit dusty."

The manager agreed that this would be a good idea.

"And could you order me a car for nine o'clock? I have to be at Heathrow by ten."

This would be arranged. The manager hoped that Mr. Rowe would not find the journey too fatiguing.

The call from Lausanne came through at six o'clock and seemed to be satisfactory. Since he did much of his important work at home, one of the rooms in the flat had been equipped as an office. Rowe spent a busy hour in it, sorting out and destroying papers, using a shredder. Then he completed the packing of two suitcases and one large air bag and went down to have dinner in the restaurant which served the apartments.

At five to nine the manager rang up to say that the hired car was on its way. Rowe gave a last look round, slammed the door behind him, and took the elevator down to the front hall. The commissionaire was absent, probably having his own evening meal. Rowe carried the suitcases to the front door and went out onto the pavement.

It was a beautiful evening, dusk but not dark. He was a perfect target for Bobby, sitting in a parked car on the other side of the road. It is likely that Rowe never even heard the shot that killed him.

Mercer had often marveled at the skill with which newspapers used the delicate weapon of innuendo. When he heard the news at eight o'clock next morning, he made Shallini go out and buy every paper she could lay her hands on.

Most of them had the picture, which had been taken by a News Agency man, of the docker striking at Rowe, with the words underneath it: "We'll get you!" This was followed by a factual account of the discovery of Rowe, shot through the heart, lying in the gutter outside the block of apartments.

When he had read them all he made a telephone call and by half-past nine was in the hastily patched-up office of Tom Hobhouse. Here he spent an hour, before walking unhurriedly to the offices in Lower Creek Street. He noticed that the number of picketers had shrunk and the ones who were there seemed subdued.

When he reached his room the telephone was ringing. It was Bobby. He seemed to be in high spirits. "Naughty, naughty," he said. "That's the third time I've rung you. Where is Mr. Mercer? Not in yet, they said. When the cat's away, eh?"

"Well," said Mercer, "now you've found me. What do you want?"

"It's not me. It's the Great White Chief. You're to come right over. *Aussi vite que possible. Schnell, schnell.*"

"All right," said Mercer.

When he had put down the telephone he sat for a long time undecided. He was under no illusion as to the dangers of his position. There were alternatives, which he considered cold-bloodedly, and rejected. In the end he got into his car and drove slowly toward Victoria, parking it on the Old Stag Brewery site among a forest of No Parking signs.

The door of the house in Wilfred Street was opened for him before he had even touched the bell. Bobby showed him into the room at the back, where Mr. Henderson was waiting for him.

He was sitting in one of the armchairs in front of the fireplace. He did not get up, but indicated by a gesture that Mercer could take the other chair. Mercer ignored the invitation, pulled out one of the hard chairs from beside the table, and sat on it, his right hand in his pocket, his left hand swinging freely to one side.

"You saw the papers?" said Mr. Henderson.

"Yes. A remarkably slanted piece of reporting. Some of them did mention the packed suitcases. It was assumed that Rowe was going abroad on business."

"Assumed?"

"He was running away."

"Why should he do that?"

"He'd made a mess of things and he knew that people in your organization who make a mess of things are bad insurance risks."

"You infer that I knew he was running away."

"Of course you knew it," said Mercer. The predominant note in his voice was irritation. "I passed the information to a friend of yours yesterday morning. I don't suppose he sat on it." There was a long silence. Mr. Henderson seemed disinclined to break it. Mercer said, "Actually, it may have turned out rather well. I saw the Union man this morning. He was glad of the chance of making a deal. The one thing Unions can't stand is any suggestion that they use criminal methods to achieve their ends. People start confusing them with the Mob, with organized crime."

"What sort of deal did you propose?"

"The obvious one. I said I'd give them what they wanted. They can have every facility for trying to recruit our staff. And a lot of good may it do them. Hobhouse seemed to think that my influence would insure the deal being carried through peacefully."

"That would mean that you would have to take Rowe's place."

"It seems the logical solution, doesn't it?"

"Yes," said Mr. Henderson. "Yes, I suppose it is."

He spent the next half hour giving Mercer instructions and a limited amount of information. Mercer listened impassively.

After Mercer left, Mr. Henderson sat for a time contemplating the line of exquisite silver cups on the ledge above the fireplace. A technician himself, he admired technique in others.

"The logical solution," he said. "First move, to replace Parker. Second move, to dispose of Rowe. Now I wonder what he is planning as his third move. To dispose of me, perhaps?"

Mr. Henderson smiled gently and stroked his mustache with the tip of one well-manicured finger.



NEXT MONTH...

11 **NEW** stories—including

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Nick Velvet)

ISAAC ASIMOV (about the Black Widowers)

HUGH PENTECOST (about Pierre Chambrun)

MICHAEL GILBERT (about Mercer)

SEICHO MATSUMOTO (Japan's Number One mystery writer)

a **NEW** short story by

ERNEST SAVAGE

One of the strangest triangles you have ever encountered in fiction—a Vietnam veteran, a girl from nowhere, and a U.S. Forest Service Ranger; and the strange duel between the two men in the gold-mining section of the San Lucas National Forest; and of the even stranger duel that followed—between the young veteran and the older Chief Deputy Ranger, the two of them sitting quietly on a fallen fir log “in front of McCoy’s cabin where you could watch the river” . . .

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

by **ERNEST SAVAGE**

McCoy saw her from a couple of hundred yards away and stopped to watch. She was standing naked in the little pool he’d dammed up for her at the edge of the river and was doing laundry in a high-sided tin tub. She held up one of his shirts to inspect it in the afternoon sun and he smiled with a sense of pleasure that was startlingly deep. In less than three months she’d grown as important to him as his limbs. Laura, who’d just wandered in one cold wet night and said, “May I stay here? I need a place to stay.”

The river roiled noisily behind his back, white water bursting in the sun, the air full of jewels; but below him—to where she stood—it ran smoothly and swiftly in its rocky channel, green and dangerous. McCoy had learned to love the river. It was full of anger and threat—things he understood—and was laced with secret gold—gold trapped in its bedrock, gold in its gravel. He had some of it, he wanted more. Since the girl came, he’d learned again to want things, to look forward. Even to hope.

U.S. Forest Service Ranger Al Marston saw the girl from a

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point halfway between the river and McCoy's cabin farther up the steep slope. Marston had been on the path approaching the cabin in search of McCoy when he saw the girl and stopped in his tracks, backing off a pace and ducking quickly behind a low ragged berm of rocks. She hadn't seen him and he grinned hugely.

Crouching behind his cover he peered at her, 30 feet away downslope, and prayed fervently that she was under-age and McCoy had finally made a mistake he could nail him for. But she didn't look under-age, Marston thought on second view; too full-bodied, too ripe standing there in the shallow pool washing McCoy's shirts, the river swift and green behind her, the backdrop pines tall and thick ascending the opposite slope. Eve, Marston thought; dark-haired, dark-eyed, a temptress. Lilith maybe, or Susanna. He reveled in the sight of her, McCoy forgotten.

By two o'clock on a sunny day, she'd discovered, the water was comfortably warm in the little pool he'd built for her, warm enough even to bathe in after the laundry was done. And the sun felt so good on her bare skin it was almost like some new kind of high; only better, she thought, and free, hers for the taking and no horrors later, no sweats, no cold shakes. She could hardly believe it.

She began to hum, the sound lost in the steady hiss and rumble of the river, but clear in her mind's ear, and strange there. Humming, she thought, me! In the middle of—what did he call it?—the San Lucas National Forest, or something, standing in the Eagle River, he'd said, this beautiful stream, the whole 20-acre thing his claim, he said, his gold mine. Gold mine! She'd been on many a trip in her time, but nothing to match this, the real thing. The real McCoy, she thought, letting it edge even further into her mind, the idea of him, of it, of three months in one place with one man, of actually being happy. A life, maybe—

Self-consciously, she stopped humming, and, businesslike, held up one of his shirts to look at a patch of pine tar that no amount of scrubbing in the cold-water detergent would remove. She must tell him, she thought, to get some kind of solvent for it the next time he went to town—and then she saw him upriver and her whole body surged with warmth. But she did not let on that she'd seen him looking at her. There was a meaning in the moment she could not quite pin down, a forgotten sense of modesty perhaps, something about that treacherous thing called love. Had he said it

to her last night?—"I love you"—or was it an echo from some schoolgirl dream? Nobody had said that to her for years.

McCoy had gone out that morning on a protein hunt and had three quail and a gray squirrel in the gamebag hanging from his belt. It was not much to show for a day's work, but he was losing his taste for meat, maybe even his need for it—and she could live on carrots, it seemed. Once he'd been a meat eater, like any other good American lad—but once he'd been a lot of things he wasn't any longer.

He'd run into Bill Hawkins up near the meadows where he'd shot the quail, and he and Bill had lunch—beans and franks—at Harry Jarvis' place. As always they'd talked about two things, gold and the damn U.S. Rangers; mostly, today, the damn U.S. Rangers. They were putting on a lot of pressure.

"They burned out two cabins last week up on the north branch," Hawkins said. "Claimed they were squatters."

"Maybe they were," McCoy said. "Not everybody in these mountains has a legal claim."

The remark went against the grain. Being partisans in a life-and-death struggle, Hawkins and Jarvis wanted no show of gray, just black and white.

"They'll pick us off one at a time," Jarvis said petulantly. "Unless we organize to stop 'em."

"It's being orchestrated in Washington," Hawkins said. "There's a hell of a lot of gold in these hills and the big mining interests've got Washington convinced they can get it out faster than we can."

"Which is true," McCoy said.

"Yeah, but they'll tear the hills down to do it, Mac. It'll look like Appalachia."

"I know," McCoy said. He'd heard it all before in his three years here, and would again, he thought. It had been going on a long time—since the sixties—but McCoy hadn't known a civil war was brewing in these hills when he bought his claim. Twenty acres of mountainside with a piece of the river flowing along the bottom edge, and a hundred-year-old dig halfway up the slope—an adit, somebody who knew the lingo had told him, a mine tunnel. And down below at the river's edge, the remnants of a long-john rocker for sifting gravel. All strange stuff to McCoy, fresh out of Letterman General in San Francisco after two and one-half years in Nam. The physical wounds had healed, but the rest of it, all those

ragged holes in his head, were still there. He'd bought it sight unseen, eagerly.

It was people who drove him away, too many of them, swarms of them. They weren't coming up the hill at him wearing black pajamas and shooting guns, but they were porridge-thick in the streets and buildings and beaches and parks, and they weren't all friendlies. So he bought his 20 acres in the wooded mountains 200 miles away from the teeming hordes of town, not knowing about the law that says a claimholder in a National Forest must take gold from his land in order to validate living on it. Not knowing a lot of things about life in the wilderness—or life anywhere for that matter. But U.S. Ranger Al Marston taught him the basics.

Marston was the self-appointed official greeter in the San Lucas National Forest. Anytime a new claimholder showed up, Marston read him the law. And a week or two later—if he was still there, and many of them weren't—Marston took a sample of the man's dig down for assaying and if it didn't show a reasonable amount of gold, the man was told to move on; for gold was the name of the game in the National Forest and if you couldn't show it, you couldn't play. Most of the claimholders had come up here, as McCoy had, not to get rich on gold, but to find and live by some fundamental law of nature long since repealed down below.

But the Ranger Service regarded them as interlopers, and Marston, personalizing the contest, called them the dregs of the earth—which some of them were. He'd driven a lot of them off, and rumor had it he was the guy who lit the match when some sluggish or rebellious squatter wouldn't move. Marston had been shot at more than once, and unlike most of the Rangers, was never without a sidearm.

"There's gonna be a meeting of the Miners' Association in town Saturday night, Mac," Jarvis said. "Seven o'clock at the Denison Café. You coming?" Jarvis eyed him skeptically.

McCoy shrugged. "Maybe." The miners had formed the association to organize their resistance to government pressure, but the meetings, to McCoy, were nothing but too many people (again) in too little space, and after the first few he'd ceased to attend. Besides, he had Marston and the Rangers at a standstill. From the first—once he'd learned the rules—he'd lived by them, and had taken gold from both the hillside digs and the river, enough to satisfy any reasonable interpretation of the law. Besides—

McCoy was comfortable with Jarvis and Hawkins. Two or

three people together made sense to him. Or maybe four, for bridge or poker. But more than that—? Meetings, rooms full of them—? “Maybe,” he said again. He got up, preparing to go. “You are one stinking bad cook,” he said to Jarvis, “but thanks anyway for lunch.” He took a quail from his gamebag and laid it on Jarvis’ rickety kitchen table. “What you do,” he said, “is first you remove the feathers and guts and then you cook it. It’s what they call a bird.”

Jarvis grinned and stood up.

“Man, you sure know your way around in the woods,” he said, “and after only three years.”

McCoy was learning how to joke again, to move with the flow of things. He was pleased with himself and feeling good when he left the two men, his friends. It was the girl, mostly, he knew that; but it was other things too, hard-won, not manna from heaven as she’d been; it was learning to use his hands, to coax vegetables out of the reluctant red earth, to tell a lupine from a poppy, a fir from a digger pine, to spot a speck of gold in a welter of sand in the pan, to read a page of print instead of scanning it like a headline; but above all, to live alone and make of himself a growing, greening terrain.

The girl had brought it all into focus, but it had been a gathering thing for three years, a man slowly putting himself back together. He would, he thought, go to the meeting Saturday night, not because he felt he, or even it, would do any good, but on the one hand to test himself against numbers again, and on the other, to spend some night hours apart from her—the harder challenge, he thought, again self-pleased.

He’d learned to love again, and is there a vein of gold in all these hills that’s worth that?

The girl wrung out McCoy’s shirt, bent the coiled shape over the side of the tin tub, and looked up at the 3:30 sun. He was early, back before he’d said he’d be, and she pretended a housewifely irritation, play-acting a line, silently. “I suppose you expect me to have everything ready just because you’re here? Lordy, I don’t even have the fire started, and here you are. Well, mister, you’d just better have something in that gamebag of yours, and no ratty squirrels, please.”

Banter; is that what they call it?—using words like soft pillows between two people who loved each other. She could say it now,

silently. Not out loud yet, even under the cover of the river's sound, but silently in her heart.

"Well, Mr. McCoy," she said, out loud this time but softly, "you can just start the fire, and will you kindly avert your eyes?" Modesty reborn. She felt new and clean—and marvelously surprised at herself. She had thought it would never happen again. She felt young—almost as young as her years.

McCoy chuckled. She'd seen him, he felt sure, but he wouldn't let on that he knew. She would chide him later for spying on her—a dirty old man—and he would say that's what she got for running around naked; and from there it would take some new path neither had been down before. He was still half frightened of it and drew back from the edge of the river and out of her sight.

A gray squirrel darted along a branch of an oak uphill and to McCoy's left, pausing long enough to make a target for McCoy's Remington 20-gauge shotgun, but then twitching away before McCoy could even plan the shot. He'd learned to like squirrel meat, roasted preferably, though the girl wouldn't touch it yet. Bushy-tailed rats, she called them, which was technically true. But she would learn, adapt, as he had.

He moved steeply upslope to the ledge of land 30 feet above the river where he'd established his garden three years ago. A steady, permanent trickle of artesian water threaded down from above the garden site, and McCoy had built a little weir-box to catch and direct its flow as needed for irrigation. It had worked well, and his garden—hers now, he conceded, with her green, moon-gear'd thumb—had grown everything he wanted, save corn, which for him never got above his knees. Maybe this year, for her, it would.

He saw Marston as he turned away from the garden and headed up the path toward the cabin. He stopped, unhooked the gamebag from his belt, and dropped it at his side. Marston hadn't heard him, hadn't moved. The susurrus of the river's race was still a considerable sound at this height and McCoy stepped forward with no attempt to muffle his tread. Marston was on his hands and knees, neck stretched, peering. McCoy's mind was icy with wordless rage. The Remington rested along his right forearm, angled safely down. He stopped 20 feet from Marston and called his name. Then he cleared his throat and called his name again, and Marston heard. . .

Marston turned his head slowly and rolled his body in the same movement. He knew it was McCoy and there was no cover for him—he was a tin can on a rock—and that he could explain McCoy's dead body more easily than he could explain the sudden unacceptable shame of this moment, and McCoy had to go; if the first shot didn't kill him, the second would and he could always tell Hanley it was him or me because he knew McCoy would be armed.

The .38 special was in his right hand as he came out of the first roll, and he shot too soon, a little wide. He was up now in a half crouch, his left hand sweeping to brace his right for the second shot when he saw the muzzle blast of McCoy's Remington, a tight, rose-red, flowering spot of fire.

It had seemed like slow motion to McCoy watching the little men in the black pajamas coming up the hill, and it seemed like slow motion now, Marston rolling, big as two of the slender Vietnamese, the gun appearing in his hand, the distant-seeming flash of fire, the sting in his bicep, Marston gaining his feet in a crouch, the cut of the trigger against his finger, the sharp up-leap of the Remington, and Marston, straightened now, coiling over backward in an almost graceful arc, his gun flying in the air and flashing in the sun.

The girl had never heard or seen anything like it before, the flat slaps of sound and the man hurtling backward over the little ridge of rock up there, and then tumbling down the slope toward her, arms and legs flying, stones coming loose.

She retreated instinctively and her left heel struck the leg of the redwood stand on which the tin tub sat, and she spun off balance and was suddenly face down in the water swallowing, choking, coming up coughing, on her hands and knees as the man plunged into her private pool, one arm flailing smartly across her legs, and the man's face and neck were—

She screamed and twisted violently away from the man's touch, slipping, her temple smashing against a half-sunk rock, and the man seeming to grasp her hips, water in her mouth again, and a great thrust of the legs to free herself, and then the strong pull of the river against which McCoy had built his dam. It was easier then and it didn't seem to matter so much that she couldn't swim—there was no terror in it any more. . .

McCoy stood still in the path for a long moment after shooting Marston. The word "No!" was building in his mind as the echo of the shot bounced itself to death in the trees. "No!" crescendoing. He ran to the crest of the little ridge and saw Marston's body roll thrashing into the girl's pool, saw her seeming to spring away from it into the deep fast water past his dam.

"No!" rendering the air now, a scream as he ran down the slope to the pool and into the river, thigh deep, and then torn off his feet and kicking, swimming, angling shoreward almost at once, the river too strong to fight. He dragged himself onto a rock and hung there, looking downstream; but she was gone.

He stood on the bank of the river, wet and chilled in the now shadowed air, staring at Marston's body trapped in the quiet pool. There was no need, he thought, for you to shoot; but he understood, even as the words formed in his mind, that Marston had had to shoot, so tender is pride, so flawed the heart. And so had he.

He bent down and gripped Marston's booted feet, feeling again the sting in his right bicep where Marston's bullet had creased it in passing. Marston was heavy, dead wet weight. McCoy hauled him onto dry ground, an arabesque of blood marbling the water of the pool before fading slowly in the drift. Marston's wound was ugly and still bleeding, but McCoy had seen worse and was more troubled by the man's weight.

He got him up to the level of the ridge and rested there for a few minutes, exhausted. He could not believe the girl was gone, so he didn't think about her, concentrating on Marston. The ranger's truck would be a half mile away, where the road ended and the trail began, a U.S. Forest Service pickup probably. It was a long way to carry a man as heavy as Marston, or any man. McCoy's motorcycle was in the little shed on the lee side of the cabin and could carry two people easily, but not, he thought, if one of them was dead. Especially over rough ground.

Rested, McCoy got up, retrieved Marston's revolver, and carefully put it back in its water-stained holster. The sun had settled below the trees and the air had turned rapidly cooler. In another hour the sun would drop below the rim of the hills and there'd be an hour of twilight before darkness set in. Marston probably checked in at headquarters in Dennison at five or five thirty, but probably wouldn't be missed if he came in an hour or two later.

Marston was a zealot, and zealots don't keep hours. Last January Marston had driven and walked through icy rain at nine p.m. to see if McCoy had renewed his fire permit for the year; hoping he hadn't, bitterly disappointed to learn that he had. It was the last time Marston had come by before this. A few days later the girl showed up.

There was no way he could carry the dead ranger over his shoulder without getting smeared with his blood, and there was no way he could drag him a half mile without tearing him up something awful and leaving too much evidence in the trail. Then he remembered an old Indian trick. In the thick growth behind his cabin he quickly found two downed lodgepole pines about twelve feet long. He trimmed them with his hatchet and then with a few lengths of rope he wove a crude hammock between the two poles, veed slightly, and rolled Marston's still supple body onto it.

It worked; it became a sledge. Standing between the butt-ends of the poles like a horse, McCoy found he could drag the weight of Marston's body almost at a walking pace, and leave very little mark in the trail.

He picked up the game-bag from near the garden and the Remington from where he'd dropped it near the ridge, took them both to the cabin, and then started out for Marston's truck, pulling the sledge.

It was dark when he got there and he was dead-tired. He'd forgotten the steep grades that were a frequent feature of the trail and, more critically, he'd forgotten to wear gloves. His hands were raw and bloody from the rough surface of the lodge-poles. The Indians must have done it differently, or were tougher than he.

He found Marston's uniform hat—which he hadn't thought about until that moment—on the seat of the truck, and his gloves on the dash shelf. He put the gloves on gratefully before dismantling the sledge and throwing the poles into the adjacent woods. Then he hoisted Marston's now stiffening body onto the empty bed of the truck and closed the tailgate. He got in the cab, put on Marston's hat, fired the engine, turned the truck around, and headed for the paved county road a mile away.

He cut back across the river a quarter mile below Dennison, then turned left onto an old logger's road that rambled through the hills serving a number of mines and miners on the opposite side of the river. McCoy knew what he was doing and didn't feel

too pleased about it. It was like dumping a dead cat over your neighbor's fence. He would leave Marston and his truck over here, then hoof it back across the river to his place. From then on he'd play it by ear, and if someone over here ended up paying too heavy a price for Marston's death, then—well, he'd see. His hands hurt too much and he was too tired to make commitments.

McCoy slept until noon and wakened still tired, staring heavy-eyed at the low ceiling overhead. He got up after a while and heated some leftover coffee on the primus, rejecting the idea of solid food. The absence of the girl was like a sullen ache in his chest, still small, about the size of her hand.

He had no timepiece in the cabin, but the slant of the shadows outdoors told him it was nearing one o'clock, and he thought it probable they had gathered the pieces and were putting them together in Dennison by then. It did not make him hurry, but it made him move.

The girl had brought nothing with her three months ago but the clothes she wore and had acquired nothing new since then. Her jeans and shirt and shoes were on the chair by the door where she'd taken them off yesterday, and her panties and socks no doubt were down below. She always did them first and spread them out on a rock to dry before doing his stuff, and when he'd seen her last she was doing his stuff.

He made a carrier out of her shirt for her jeans and shoes and jacket from the peg on the wall, and then went down to the river to pick up her panties and socks. His stuff, still in the tin tub, and the box of cold-water detergent on the shore, he'd take to the cabin on his way back from this place downriver where he'd take her clothes.

It was where the river and the county road were fairly close, and where, when the weather was a little warmer, kids from Dennison, or hippies from anywhere, would stop and swim, sometimes in the buff. The river formed an elbow there and the water was slow and safe. It was about a mile downstream from his place and McCoy, blazing a path alongside the river bank, looked for her body in every possible spot; but it had gone on past the elbow, and was down below somewhere, probably already found.

McCoy was tempted to search as far as the bridge a half mile farther on, and if it had been earlier he might have, but the river became more public as it worked its way west and he didn't want

to risk being seen. He made a neat stack of the girl's clothes alongside a tree and stood above them for a moment feeling the ache in his chest grow. Then he headed back upriver slowly, making very sure the girl's body wasn't snared in some half-hidden tangle of roots and rock, for to find it *above* the clothes would be unthinkable.

Chief Deputy Ranger Jack Hanley could see McCoy's motorcycle behind the padlocked door of the lean-to that housed it and knew McCoy was on foot, wherever he was. Then Hanley tried the back door of McCoy's cabin and found it open, but didn't go in. There was an old fallen fir log in front of McCoy's cabin where you could watch the river, and Hanley went there and sat.

It was a little after five and the sun was below the tree-line. According to the pathologist's report, Hanley figured, Marston would have been dead about 24 hours now. Almost exactly as long as the girl had been dead. The Sheriff didn't think there was a connection between the two deaths, but Hanley did. Hanley had been a Forest Ranger for almost 30 years and had acquired some of the instincts of a natural-born woodsman; of an Indian, some people thought. He was a tall, lanky, middle-aged man and had the beaked nose and narrowed blue eyes of a central-casting pioneer. Most of the miners liked him. They thought he was fair.

Hanley, with his trained ear, heard McCoy before he saw him, and then watched with interest as McCoy emerged from the growth along the river and picked up the tin tub from its stand on the pool and the big box of cold-water detergent from the river bank. McCoy didn't see Hanley until he was halfway up the slope to the cabin; then McCoy stopped for two beats before coming on, circling the fallen fir and going on up to the cabin with his load. Neither man spoke until McCoy came back down and sat on the log five feet from Hanley. It was growing darker and colder.

"You didn't find her, did you?" Hanley said finally.

"Find who?"

"The girl."

"What girl?"

"Well, I thought *you* could tell *me* that," Hanley said.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"She was nude," Hanley said, "so we've got no quick identity, and young enough so that maybe nobody ever took her fingerprints."

"I don't know what you're talking about," McCoy repeated.

"So I thought maybe you could tell me her name—or at least her last name. We've got her first name—Laura. Pretty."

A chill swept McCoy's back. That ankle chain she wore, he thought. So they'd found her for sure. But where?

"What you're up against is this," Hanley said. "There's only two places she could have come from—here and about a mile downstream where the road and river nearly meet."

"Well then, she came from there," McCoy said. "Whoever she is."

"No, she didn't—unless naked she was born and naked she went through this world. We couldn't find her clothes down there."

McCoy shrugged, but felt color build in his face. "Why are you telling me all this?" he said. He didn't look at Hanley.

"Because I thought you'd like to know," Hanley said, "that she wasn't too badly banged up when they found her. That river can be mighty rough on human flesh sometimes."

"Well, I'm glad," McCoy said, meaning it. "Whoever she is." The heat in him had cooled a bit. They'd found her below where he'd put her clothes—that seemed certain now; but he was beginning to come apart inside, to really feel her loss.

"Well, if you want to play it that way," Hanley said, "it's your hand. The Sheriff'll buy it because it's not a homicide, probably. There was a lot of water in her lungs, so she just plain drowned, probably. But I won't buy it because it doesn't account for Marston and we've got to do that, don't we? What's the matter with your hands?"

"What?" McCoy turned his palms up in the fading light. The flesh beneath the broken blisters had turned dark, like blood. "I was a damn fool," McCoy said. "Yesterday I split wood without my gloves. What about Marston?"

"He was in the river, too, or he had been. But you know that, don't you?"

"You mean Marston's dead?" McCoy looked at him in the dwindling light and Hanley smiled amiably.

"Nice try," he said, "but Laurence Olivier you ain't. Yeah, Marston's dead and has been ever since you shot him about this time yesterday, maybe a little earlier. Marston had you on his schedule yesterday."

"I was hunting all day," McCoy said. "Ask Hawkins—or Jarvis. Marston must have come by when I was gone."

"I talked to Hawkins a while ago, McCoy, and no doubt you were gone when Marston came by—but the girl wasn't. Laura. She was down there in that little pool doing laundry, buck naked."

McCoy sighed. He didn't want to be talking about the girl; he wanted to mourn her in silence and privacy. But the trouble was, he wasn't sure that someone didn't know they'd been living together. It was hard to keep a thing like that secret for three months, even here. But he had to play it that way.

"Oh, come on, Hanley," he said disdainfully.

"What was he about to do?" Hanley said. "Attack her? She must have been one hell of a sight down there in the river when he walked up. September Morn. It's not the kind of thing Marston would handle well—he'd go a little ape. He'd go down there and take her, figuring you were gone for the day. He didn't have very good judgment. He couldn't think much past his own feelings."

McCoy was silent.

"Then you came along from upriver and saw him. Maybe the girl hollered for help, I don't know, but you probably saw each other at the same moment and shot at the same moment and your shot blew him into the girl's pool and blew her out of it into the river. And his shot?" Hanley peered at him in the growing dark. "Probably off in the woods somewhere."

"It's just a theory," McCoy said.

"Yeah, but a good one, isn't it? The thing is," Hanley said, "Marston's gun was dry. It had been fired—once; but it hadn't gone into the river with him, so he must have dropped it on dry land before he hit the water. Put that together with the girl's nude body and all that laundry apparatus down there and what you've got, McCoy, is a picture ready to hang on the wall. Explain it to me some other way."

"You can't prove it," McCoy said thickly.

"I don't even know," Hanley said, "that I want to. Oh, I know we could find a lot of her prints around your place if we tried, but what's the use? The Sheriff thinks it's a simple drowning, and he doesn't know what to think about Marston, and won't know until I tell him. But what's the use of that, either? I should have had Marston transferred a long time ago—so whose fault is it, really? Don't answer that," he added.

Hanley fell silent and remained that way for quite a while before finally pushing to his feet. "What did she do," he said, "just

drift in one day and hang around until you took her in? A dope-ridden kid you thought you could nurse back to health? You should've known better, McCoy. Not many of 'em make it."

McCoy looked up at him in the thickening dark, and Hanley saw the glisten of wet in his eyes. It surprised him. "She would've," McCoy said.

"I doubt it," Hanley said. "Those needle scars on her arm had been there a long time."

"She hadn't had a thing for three months. She was making it."

Hanley shook his head. "They're bad news, son, all of them. They eat you up in time—they're takers, all of them. You're better off."

"She wasn't," McCoy said. "She was giving—I was taking. We were—"

"What?"

"Each other's bootstraps, Hanley. We were cross-pollenizers, we both would've made it."

Yeah, Hanley thought. He was older and tougher than this young man. He'd seen dozens of the earth-children wander through his forest and he knew the odds on their making anything but trouble. There's an essential despair in them, he'd decided long ago, they're in search of their own deaths, and they find them early on, usually.

In his pocket Hanley had the ankle chain from the girl's body. Etched on the small oval disc attached to it was the legend: *Laura. Born 9/16/59 And Died Soon After*. Not the sentiment of someone who hopes to "make it," or is a "giver." Too bitter, self-mocking.

He'd thought to give the chain to McCoy because it was the single effect the girl had had; but now he changed his mind. He would drop it in the river—as a kind of epitaph.

He liked that; it was like closing a file, and he had his own way of being tidy. But he still had to have McCoy admit to killing Marston, just to hear him say it.

"You shot him, didn't you?" he said.

"I had no choice," McCoy shrugged faintly. "He shot first. He meant to kill me."

"I believe it," Hanley said.

"It went almost like you said, except he winged me—a crease."

"You tore him up pretty good."

"A shotgun will do that."

"You can stay," Hanley said abruptly. "Nobody will bother you from now on. We won't try to make a case. You were Marston's folly, not mine."

"No," McCoy said. "I'm going to start pulling up stakes. Maybe two weeks, I'll be gone." It was a decision he had made while he sat there.

"Why? You got all the gold you want?" Hanley didn't want him to go; he wanted the good ones to stay.

McCoy stood up. "Maybe that's not what I came for," he said. "Maybe I got what I came for."

For the first time in years McCoy felt a sense of lightness, of mobility; he felt free to move, to make choices. There was a world out there that could be his now—and hers, that part of her, at least, that the river had not taken from him. He valued that more than anything else he had. "A week," he said. "I'll be gone in a week."

He turned and walked up the slope to his cabin, and Hanley watched until he heard the creak of the cabin door, open and shut. Then Hanley faced the river and threw the ankle chain as far as he could into the darkening water. In the forest there are the quick and the dead, he thought; and that's the way it should be.

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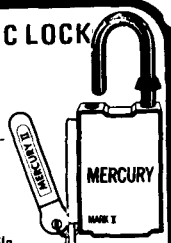
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THE 23 BROWN PAPER BAGS

by **JACK RITCHIE**

On the rear floor of the victim's automobile we found 23 small brown paper bags, each containing two bars of hand soap. Sales slips indicated that they had been purchased at 23 different supermarkets.

"Well, Ralph," I said happily. "What do you make of this?"

"Nothing yet, Henry."

According to the victim's wallet, he had been James L. Flanagan, age 58, and a resident of Big Cedar Falls, a small community some 70 miles north of our city.

Flanagan had been shot once through the heart while sitting in his automobile before unit Number 33 of the Sunset Motel. His body had been discovered at approximately 9:15 that evening by a couple who had just been assigned Number 34. No one appeared to have seen the murder or heard the shot.

When Ralph and I arrived at the scene, several squad cars had preceded us and cordoned off the area from the gathering crowd.

Scattered about inside the car beside Flanagan, we recovered over \$400 in bills, all of them ones, fives, and tens. The victim's topcoat pockets yielded nearly \$10 in silver.

© 1979 by Jack Ritchie.

"Looks like a holdup that went sour," Ralph said. "Flanagan took the wallet out of his pocket and then he either decided to resist or the holdup man thought he was about to, and pulled the trigger. The impact of the bullet caused Flanagan to scatter the bills and the gunman decided that he wasn't going to stay at the scene of a murder grubbing around a corpse for bills."

"And how do you explain the twenty-three bags of soap?"

"I don't. What makes you think that they have anything at all to do with the killing?"

"Ralph," I said somberly. "They are the very heart of the matter."

We had removed Flanagan's tagged motel key from his pocket and now I unlocked the door of unit Number 33 and we entered. It was a typical motel room, containing the basic twin beds, TV set, several chairs, and two night tables.

I began searching. In a bureau drawer I found a small supply of underwear, shirts, socks, and handkerchiefs. "Ah, ha," I said.

"Ah, ha what?"

"Flanagan brought shirts and a few other things with him, but I doubt if he transported them in a paper bag. So where is his suitcase? There was none in his car and there is none in this room. It all fits in."

"What fits in?"

"The man who shot Flanagan also stole his suitcase. After he shot Flanagan he cold-bloodedly reached into the car and took Flanagan's suitcase."

"Why would he want to steal Flanagan's suitcase?"

"Because it still contained some very valuable merchandise. And Flanagan kept the suitcase with him at all times, I'll wager. Wherever he went. Ralph, now think intensely: why would a man buy forty-six bars of the same brand of soap at twenty-three different places?"

Ralph shrugged. "Maybe he was trying to get change."

"Exactly."

He looked at me.

"Ralph, Flanagan wanted legitimate money for the counterfeit twenty-dollar bills he was passing. In other words, he would buy two bars of soap, get approximately nineteen and a half dollars in change, and then move on to the next supermarket and repeat the process."

Ralph looked skyward. "Henry, what makes you so positive

these alleged counterfeit bills had to be twenties? Why not fives, or tens, or hundreds?"

"Because, inflation being what it is, it simply does not make sense to counterfeit five- or ten-dollar bills any more. If you are going to counterfeit money, you might just as well make twenty-dollar bills. After all, it requires no more skill or time to counterfeit a twenty than it does a five or a ten."

Ralph was difficult to sell. "Why couldn't he have been passing phony one-hundred-dollar bills?"

"Because you just don't go into a supermarket and present a hundred-dollar bill in payment for two bars of soap. You would be remembered and perhaps unkindly. But who remembers your face or your twenty-dollar bill in the express line of a supermarket? Perhaps half of the bills cashed there are twenties."

Ralph sighed. "Maybe."

"Ralph," I said, "we are undoubtedly dealing with a syndicate murder."

"What syndicate?"

"Any syndicate. There's bound to be one behind this."

"And how do you arrive at that, Henry?"

"Because counterfeiting is not exactly a Mom and Pop operation. One needs the engraver, the plates, the paper, and the distribution system." I nodded wisely. "Yes, I suspect that Flanagan tried to double-cross the syndicate in some way. So the syndicate put out a contract on him and hired a hit man."

"Contract? Hit man?"

"Ralph, that is underworld jargon for—"

"I know. I know."

When we stepped out of the motel unit, one of the fingerprint men approached us. "We got a thumbprint from the window frame of Flanagan's car and it doesn't belong to Flanagan."

Ralph looked at me. "Have you ever heard of a hit man who would leave his thumbprint on the car of his victim?"

"Ralph," I said patiently, "why does the print have to be that of our hit man? I'll wager it probably belongs to the attendant at the last service station Flanagan patronized."

We began walking toward the manager's office.

"Ralph, I think I can intelligently reconstruct the entire case. Flanagan worked for the syndicate as a passer of counterfeit money. He periodically traveled from city to city passing the twenty-dollar bills, keeping a portion of the proceeds for himself

and passing on to the syndicate that which belonged to the syndicate. However, he got greedy."

"How do you know he got greedy?"

"Ralph, it is common knowledge that whenever anybody crosses the syndicate it is usually because of greed. He tried to hold out on the take. And so when Flanagan parked his car here after a successful day of passing phony twenties, the hit man was waiting. He ordered Flanagan to remove any of the twenties he might still have in his wallet and hand them over."

"Why would he do that?"

"Because the last thing the syndicate would want is for the police to find phony twenties on Flanagan and begin putting two and two together. And after disposing of Flanagan, the killer calmly reached into the car and took Flanagan's suitcase. Undoubtedly it still contained stacks of twenties which Flanagan had not yet had the opportunity to cash."

"Henry, did you notice the wound? Very little blood and the bullet didn't even come out of his back. I'll bet the coroner finds a .22 slug. Did you ever hear of a hit man who used a .22?"

It took a couple of steps to come up with the only logical explanation. "Just as an expert fisherman takes pride in the lightness, or test, of his line, so does our hit man take pride in the smallness of the caliber of the weapon he uses. I wouldn't be at all surprised if one of these days we find a .190 slug in the carcass of a syndicate victim."

We entered the motel manager's office.

He was a bald bulky man who had obviously fortified himself with a few drinks while he waited to be questioned.

"What can you tell us about James L. Flanagan?" I asked.

He blinked. "Who's Flanagan?"

I smiled. "Ah, but of course. Flanagan used an alias when he registered. I am speaking of the deceased."

"He registered as Albert Johnson this morning at about ten o'clock and I gave him the key."

I nodded. "Did he stop here regularly? Say for a few days every month or two?"

The manager shrugged. "I wouldn't know. I've been here only two weeks."

I frowned thoughtfully.

He elaborated. "But I been working for the syndicate for nearly twenty years."

Ralph seemed to wake up. "Syndicate?"

The manager nodded. "Allied Properties. It owns hundreds of these motels all over the country. I used to manage a place in St. Paul, but the climate finally got to me and I was given a transfer."

I took Ralph aside and lowered my voice. "Did you hear what he said, Ralph? He works for the syndicate."

"Henry, it's a different kind of syndicate."

I chuckled. "It all reminds me of Poe's *The Purloined Letter*."

"Everything reminds you of *The Purloined Letter*."

I nodded. "Ralph, where is the best place to hide a syndicate? In a syndicate, of course. We have just been talking to our hit man. He was cleverly placed here by the syndicate for the sole purpose of eliminating Flanagan. What would you like to bet that within a week or two he will be transferred again. Don't you see, Ralph, our hit man is coolly twitting the police by announcing that he is a member of the syndicate, thinking that we will assume that he means Allied Properties."

I moved back to the manager and shrewdly asked, "Is there anything at all you can tell us about the man who registered as Albert Johnson?"

He shook his head. "Nothing. Except that there was a woman asking for him this afternoon."

I frowned. "A woman?"

"She came in about four thirty and asked for Johnson's unit number. I told her."

"And then what did she do?"

"She looked down at Number 33 and I guess she figured he wasn't in because his car wasn't there. So she got on her bicycle and rode away."

"Bicycle?" Ralph said.

I closed in. "Can you describe this woman?"

"She was about the middle twenties, I'd guess. Black hair. Blue eyes. Average height. Wearing glasses. Good-looking in a quiet way."

"Did she leave a name?" I asked.

"No. She just asked for Johnson's number."

I drew Ralph aside once more. "I have been wrong."

"Impossible."

I nodded. "I must admit it. However, I was dealing with a puzzle in which one piece did not fit."

"What piece is that, Henry?"

"The .22 caliber slug."

"But you said—"

I held up a hand. "I was wrong, Ralph, and I am man enough to admit it. Don't you see, Ralph, we are not dealing with a hit *man*, but a hit *woman*. Or hit person, if you prefer. The .22 caliber is a woman's weapon. Our hit person waited in the darkness for Flanagan to return from his day's work. She shot him, stole the suitcase, hopped onto her bike, and expertly pedaled away."

Ralph went back to the manager. "Do you have any aspirins?"

When Ralph and I got back to headquarters, we put in a phone call to the Chief of Police of Big Cedar Falls. We found that not only was Flanagan a highly respected member of that community, but he was also its mayor and the Scout Leader of Troop 147. In dying, he had left behind a wife, though no children.

The next afternoon, when Ralph and I reported in for our swing shift, Captain Masterson had more information for us.

"Every two months or so we get a big batch of phony twenties passed here. They all come from the same plate and the plate was made by Jerry Stockton, one of the best engravers this country ever had."

I nodded. "And nobody knows where Stockton is?"

"We know where he is all right. In his grave. He died in a federal pen about fifteen years ago." Masterson leaned back in his swivel chair. "Stockton served one term for making ten-dollar bills when a ten-dollar bill still meant something. When he came out, he got a good job with a legitimate engraving firm. But after a year he suddenly disappeared. He was still on parole at the time, so naturally the government was interested and also suspicious. Either he had, or was about to, make another set of plates.

"And sure enough, phony twenties started showing up in and around Portland, Oregon. The experts recognized Stockton's work—they tell me that each engraver's got his own particular style—and so the T-men closed in on the area and after a couple of months picked him up. He was holed up on a farm just outside of Portland. They also found the plates and about three million dollars in counterfeit twenties."

"Ah," I said. "But obviously there were more printed counterfeits than everybody thought?"

"Obviously. Five years after Stockton's arrest they suddenly began appearing in the midwest. And they've been doing that reg-

ularly for the last twenty-five years.”

Ralph had a question. “How come Stockton could be picked up in a couple of months, but nobody’s been able to lay hands on the passer here in twenty-five years?”

“Because in Oregon the T-men knew who they were looking for. They went up there with a lot of Stockton’s mug shots and spread them around. It was just a matter of time before Stockton was spotted and they could close in. But here it’s different. We don’t know who the passer or passers are or what they look like.”

“Captain,” I said, “I would like the department’s permission to go to Big Cedar Falls and speak to James L. Flanagan’s widow.”

“Henry,” Masterson said, “you’ve got a nice interesting theory and all, but actually we’ve got nothing concrete to tie Flanagan in with the phony twenties. Not even one sample.” Then he sighed. “You won’t have to go all the way up to Big Cedar Falls. His widow came down today and she’s waiting for the coroner to release her husband’s body so that she can make arrangements to have it shipped back home for burial.” He handed me a slip of paper. “This is where she’s staying while she’s here. But be careful, Henry. Flanagan was the mayor of Big Cedar Falls and a Boy Scout Leader. Personally, I don’t think he had a damn thing to do with passing counterfeit money.”

Ralph and I drove to 414 East Cumberland. The address proved to be a three-story apartment building perhaps half a mile from the motel in which Flanagan had been killed.

In the foyer of the building I examined the mailbox slots. Number 306 was identified by a single word: Flanagan.

I rubbed my chin.

“There’s one thing that bothers me, Henry,” Ralph said. “If Flanagan was passing counterfeit twenties, why did he buy just soap? Why not cigarettes at one place, ballpoint pens at another, and so on?”

“Probably as a novice passer twenty-five years ago he did that very thing, Ralph. However, he soon discovered that making twenty-five or more decisions a day for several days could become quite wearing. Therefore he decided to concentrate on a single commodity on each excursion. Yesterday it was soap. Today, if he had lived, it might have been canned tuna.”

On the third floor I knocked at door Number 306.

It was opened by a composed, mild-eyed woman in her late forties.

"Mrs. Flanagan?" I asked.

"Yes."

Ralph and I identified ourselves. "We're sorry to intrude on you at a moment like this," I said. "However, we would like to ask you a few questions about your husband."

She allowed us to enter the apartment. It was a rather small place with overflowing bookcases.

"Mrs. Flanagan," I said. "You and your husband are natives of Big Cedar Falls?"

"Well, yes and no. I was born there, but Jimmy wasn't. He came from Oregon. But I guess he didn't like Oregon much, because he hardly ever mentioned it at all."

"Your husband was the mayor of Big Cedar Falls?"

She nodded.

"How much does the job pay?"

"Seven hundred dollars a year. It's a very part-time job, except on the Fourth of July, when he has to make a speech and supervise the fireworks."

I cleared my throat. "Then obviously being the mayor of Big Cedar Falls was not your husband's manner of earning a living?"

"He was a traveling salesman. Industrial insurance. And he must have been a really good one because actually he didn't have to travel too much to earn a nice living. He was gone only a few days each month."

"Did you ever see any of the brochures, pamphlets, or other literature that a seller of industrial insurance might carry with him?"

"Well, no. The truth is that I'm not really interested in the world of business. I know I should feel guilty about it, but I'm just a housewife and gardener and belong to all our civic clubs. This year we came out strong against vandalism in the town park."

There was a brief knock at the door.

"That's probably Deidre," Mrs. Flanagan said. "This is her apartment."

She opened the door and I found myself staring at a girl carrying a bag of groceries. She was in her mid-twenties. Black hair. Blue eyes. Average height. Wearing glasses. And good-looking in a quiet way.

Hmm, I thought.

Mrs. Flanagan introduced us. "Deidre is my niece. My brother's daughter. When she was ten years old, my brother and his wife

were killed in an automobile accident and Deidre came to stay with us. Deidre's a Teacher's Assistant at the university here and she's working on her Ph.D. Her thesis is on crossword puzzles, double-crostics, and other words games, and their effect on the ego."

Deidre regarded me warily.

I smiled. "Public storehouse?"

"Etape," she said.

"Click beetle?"

"Elator. Usually. Sometimes Dor. Or Dorr." She spelled the last two nouns.

"Tilled land?"

"Arada. Less frequently arado."

I nodded approvingly. "Basic, of course. But do you know a five-letter word for the shin bone of the New Guinea aborigine?"

A phone rang in the kitchenette and Deidre went to answer it. She looked back into the room. "It's a Captain Masterson. He'd like to speak to either one of you."

Ralph went to the phone.

Mrs. Flanagan had been studying me. "So you're a policeman? Actually Jimmy used to be a policeman himself. A state trooper in Oregon. He never mentioned anything about it at all though except for one evening a few years ago when he came home from the Kiwanis picnic with a few too many beers and got talkative. But he never talked about it again."

I turned to Deidre. "Do you have a bicycle?"

"Yes. A ten-speed."

"When your uncle came to town, he always stayed at the Sunset Motel?"

"Yes. My apartment is too cramped and so he always preferred to spend the night there."

Mrs. Flanagan nodded. "I'm going to stay at a hotel tonight. Deidre has just one bedroom and she's offered to sleep on the davenport, but I wouldn't hear of it."

I spoke to Deidre. "Were you at the Sunset Motel at approximately four thirty yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes. I happened to be passing by and I thought I'd drop in if he was there. But I could see that his car was gone, so I left."

"Did you go back to the motel later that evening?"

Her eyes flickered suspiciously. "No."

Ralph came back into the room. "Well, they got him."

I frowned. "Got who?"

Ralph spoke to Mrs. Flanagan. "The kid who shot your husband. A sixteen-year-old who lives in the neighborhood. He got hold of a .22 pistol and decided to try a stickup at the motel. He thought your husband was about to jump him, so he fired. Then he panicked and ran away."

"Ralph," I said, "there must be some mistake."

"No mistake. His thumbprint matches the one on the window frame of Flanagan's car. That's how the kid was tracked down. He's got a juvenile record and his prints are on file. They're doing the ballistics tests on his gun now. Also he confessed."

"Did they find the suitcase?" I asked.

"No, Henry. They didn't find any suitcase."

I turned to Mrs. Flanagan. "When your husband left home, he carried a suitcase, didn't he?"

She thought about that. "I don't really remember. Jimmy wasn't much of a packer. I've known him to just throw some clean underwear into a paper bag and that was that."

When Ralph and I reached our department car downstairs I said, "Ralph, I left my notebook back up there. I'll be back in a few minutes."

When I knocked at door 306 again, Deidre answered. "Oh?"

I beckoned her out into the hallway, closed the apartment door, then led her to the end of the hall.

"Let me tell you a story," I said. "Once upon a time there was a young state trooper in Oregon, stationed somewhere near Portland. One fine day he participated in a raid on a farm on which a Jerry Stockton, forger *extraordinaire*, was apprehended, along with some three million dollars in counterfeit money and the plates which printed them. At the time the authorities thought that all the money printed had been confiscated. They were wrong.

"Somehow this trooper had stumbled on a cache of more counterfeit bills. But he did not turn them in. Instead he hid them. Then he waited five more years before he quit his job. He traveled halfway across the country and established a new identity. He settled down in a small town named Big Cedar Falls. He married. He had no children, but at least one niece. He became mayor of the town. But every month he would be away for a few days. To this city. Perhaps to others as well. And he passed the phony twenty-dollar bills."

She smiled admiringly. "You have a fantastic imagination."

I agreed. "And he did this all unbeknownst to his wife."

"Unbeknownst?"

"Yes. Because if it were beknownst, I don't think she would have so lightly and freely volunteered all that information about her husband." I regarded Deidre sternly. "But his nefarious activities were not unbeknownst to his niece."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because I suspect that his niece has a great deal more curiosity than her aunt. And I imagine that she early began wondering whether her uncle really was a salesman of industrial insurance. Why was he home so much? She probably pried and spied, and it all combined to the point where he finally told her."

"Why do you think he told her?"

"Because yesterday afternoon at four thirty she stopped at the Sunset Motel and asked which unit her uncle was occupying."

Her eyes clouded in recall. "I don't see what that proves."

I smiled. "When she asked for her uncle's unit number, she did not ask for *James Flanagan's* number, she asked for *Albert Johnson's*."

"Oh," she said.

I nodded. "In other words, she knew that her uncle was registered there under an assumed name. And knowing that, is it too far-fetched to assume that she also knew *why* he was using an assumed name?"

I chided. "Why didn't she turn her uncle in to the authorities when she first learned that he was passing counterfeit money?"

"Oh, come now. If you had an uncle who took you in when your parents died and fed you and clothed you and saw to it that you received a good education, would you turn him in? It isn't like murder, you know."

Then she smiled. "She admits nothing. I understand that some four hundred dollars in bills were found with this uncle. I'll bet there wasn't a counterfeit twenty among them."

"True. But I now realize that this uncle had just *completed* cashing his quota of phony twenties for the day and so, of course, it would not be likely that he had any more of them in his wallet. However, he must have had more somewhere near him. I doubt that he came all the way down here to spend only one day cashing twenties. And it is those other twenties which have disappeared."

"You don't say?"

I did. "I believe that this niece came back to the motel later in the evening to see her uncle and she discovered his body. She knew that he had more counterfeit twenties with him and she realized that if the police found them they might piece together his activities and all would be revealed. It would bring disgrace and ruination to her beloved aunt who lives in a small town and wishes to remain there. Or was this niece actually her uncle's accomplice?"

"More like a beneficiary, I would guess. Until she could earn her own living."

I nodded. "So she took the phony twenties he still had—they were probably somewhere in the car—and biked away. Suppose I were to get a warrant to search her apartment?"

"You'd go through all that trouble and time just to find what will probably be an empty briefcase?"

I winced. But of course. A *briefcase*. "This uncle probably didn't bring his entire cache of counterfeit twenties down here with him. Would this niece know where the rest of them are?"

"Perhaps."

"And is this niece ready to cooperate fully with the police and tell all she knows?"

"No. That would be defeating her purpose, wouldn't it?"

"Very well," I said stiffly. "Since I have no concrete evidence of any kind I am forced to leave the matter as it is." I wagged a finger. "However, I must warn this niece that I shall keep a vigilant eye on the funny-money market. If a supply of counterfeit twenties continues to appear, I will pursue the matter relentlessly."

"Yes, sir," she said.

When I got into our car, Ralph said, "What took you so long?"

"We got to talking."

He pulled the car away from the curb. "Well, Henry, there is no syndicate and Flanagan had nothing to do with passing phony twenties. But I still can't figure why he had those twenty-three paper bags of soap in the back of his car."

I chuckled. "Ralph, as usual, you miss the obvious. The soap wasn't the significant factor at all. It was the sales slips."

"Sales slips?"

"You completely forgot that Flanagan was a Scoutmaster who would do what he could for his charges. I learned from Mrs.

Flanagan that one of them, Baldwin Brettschneider, a stalwart lad, collects sales slips just as other people collect stamps, coins, or book matches. Flanagan promised him that he would pick up as many sales slips as he could while he was down here. Baldwin has quite an extensive collection and he's planning to exhibit it in the hobby division of the next county fair."

Ralph drove for a while. "Henry, I was with you up to 'a stalwart lad,' but then you began to lose me. What are you trying to cover up?"

"I'll tell you about it sometime, Ralph. But not this year."

At the end of our shift Ralph dropped me off at my apartment. I was making a midnight sandwich in my kitchenette when the phone rang.

"Turnbuckle?" Deidre asked. "Sergeant Henry Turnbuckle?"

"The only one in the telephone book," I said proudly.

There was a momentary silence. "All right, Henry, just what the hell *is* a five-letter word for the shinbone of a New Guinea aborigine?"

"I forget at the moment. But I could look it up. Do you have any reference books in your apartment?"

"Lots."

"Good. I'll be over in half an hour."

I put on my orange jacket and hood. Downstairs I checked my reflectors and my light. Then I unlocked my bike and pedaled over to Deidre's place.

"Q"

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THE WINNING EDGE

by **GERALD TOMLINSON**

I'd been at the card table for 18 hours straight. So had Deuce Amboy. So had Lanny Saybrook.

Amboy's fourth pat hand of the game, a nine-high straight, had just taken a \$2500 pot, and the little pro must have been pleased, though he didn't show it as he raked in the chips.

Lanny Saybrook, beaten with three jacks, showed more emotion. He sneered like a heavy from the silent movies and raised a glass of bourbon unsteadily to his lips. From games gone by I knew Saybrook as a mediocre player and a bitter loser.

The poker chips were beginning to blur, but I kept dealing. Both Saybrook and Amboy looked frayed, stubbly, and grim.

I'm a professional at cards. Bachelor of Arts, Ohio State. Doctor of Baccarat, Good Times Casino, Newport, Kentucky. I'm also a fair poker player, a steady winner but not sensational. Good enough to be a pro, to get by on an honest 52-card deck, to make my living without waving a shovel or a frying pan or a pencil.

I've always been a smooth dealer. I practice in my spare time, and I've got quick, unerring fingers. I deal better than I play, actually. Dexterity without judgment—that's what a glassy-eyed dentist, down eight G's at lowball, told me in Philly a long time ago, and I guess he knew, because he didn't have either.

Still, I'm a solid player, if not terrific. I know the odds, I study my opponents. And I usually win. But I don't win the way Deuce Amboy wins, and I don't quite know why. There's something uncanny about the success of a top poker player. What is it? You

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can't bring yourself to admit that a little weasel like Deuce Amboy is better than you are, that he knows something you don't know.

But he is and he does. Whether he's called Pug Pearson, or Jolly Roger, or Amarillo Slim, that top player has an extra something, a winning edge. Maybe it's brains. Maybe it's instinct. Whatever it is, it's more than luck, because without it you're an also-ran nine times out of ten.

So here I was, propping up my eyelids in the Skyway Inn at JFK Airport, New York City, dead-tired and dealing draw poker for two high-stakes gents in a two-hundred-dollar-a-night suite.

How come? Well, it happened this way. A week ago Deuce Amboy, premier gambler from Las Vegas, one of the three or four best poker players in the country, phoned me in Lake Ronkonkoma and invited me to Lanny Saybrook's private game at the Skyway Inn, just off the runways at JFK.

I'd be dealing, not playing. Dealing the cards straight and proper, which meant no funny decks, no border work, no line work or brace work. And no sleight of hand, meaning no bottom deals, cold decks, false shuffles, or shifty cuts.

Amboy didn't need help like that. He needed a cool, reliable dealer, a dealer Lanny Saybrook had met, played with, observed, and trusted. In short, he needed a respectable next-door neighbor of Saybrook's. Like me.

He also needed a bodyguard—I'm a retired Copacabana bouncer—since one of the seven players invited to Lanny's high-stakes game at JFK was Bruno Riker, the Queens mobster. While Amboy liked the kind of bankroll Riker would wheel in, he didn't care for the shoulder-holstered muscle he knew would tag along to watch. Deuce wanted his own dealer and his own protection. Saybrook agreed.

Now, I'd dealt a good hi-lo game in Hicksville three months before. Bruno Riker had been there with his hirelings. So had Saybrook. They weren't new to me. But Amboy had been there, too.

The shrewd little Deuce, a living legend at the age of 73, was the big winner that night. I'd lost a few bucks, but I had a little luck at the same time. Amboy liked the way I dealt. A dapper ferret himself, he's always been a great admirer of sharp, accurate moves in a dealer. I'd known that for years from hearsay, but up to then our paths had never crossed. I was glad he'd finally seen me work.

When Amboy phoned from L.A., he mapped out the turf for me. Except for Bruno Riker, I'd have no worries, he said. Neither would he. The other players were pigeons—honest, well-feathered, ready to be plucked. They were business and professional types, snagged on big-time poker, middle-aged men who liked to boast how they'd tangled with the great Deuce Amboy.

Oh, yeah, they'd admit the truth when pressed—they'd lost—sure, they'd lost a little cash in the game, lost their shirts maybe, but what the hell . . . Nobody beats Deuce Amboy.

Well, Bruno Riker didn't beat him. After 14 hours of wheezing effort the big Queens mobster had dropped \$15,000 and change. He could afford that and more, but he grunted and called it quits, pushing his chair away from the table, nodding to his two torpedoes who were hovering nearby. He snapped, "So long, Amboy. See you in Vegas next month."

That was it. Bruno Riker, the biggest mob gambler since Arnold Rothstein, marched away at the head of his entourage. A loser but no patsy.

Four other players soon followed him out. Only one of them, a new-car dealer from Patchogue, had managed to break even over the stretch. Most of them were delighted to leave. They'd each won a hand or two that they could brag about to their friends. Amboy had seen to that.

Lanny Saybrook stayed on.

Oyster Bay's own Lanny Saybrook, 35 grand in the hole by now, is what is known as a compulsive gambler, which means a compulsive loser.

What more can I say about him?

Plenty. I could write a book.

But the saga of Evan Lancelot Saybrook III is already well-known.

Born in a Hudson River manor house, Saybrook *files* sidestepped corporate law despite the urgings of his relatives in the Wall Street firm of Saybrook, Saybrook, Saybrook & Gelb. He rose to fame in criminal law instead, defending mass murderers, political terrorists, syndicate dons, and the like, as well as hitching his Excalibur SS to various bizarre and unpopular cases.

All in all, a traitor to his class, which, for the record, was Columbia Law '41.

Saybrook's first courtroom triumph came in the spring of 1942 in the Hodder case, when he managed to spring a legal technical-

ity on the prosecutor, at the same time springing Stu Hodder, a homicidal maniac from the North Bronx, a madman who, fortunately for residents of Kingsbridge and Mosholu, took pity on everyone thereabouts and bellywhoppered off the GW Bridge, yelling either "Banzai!" or "Geronimo!"—witnesses weren't sure which—soon after his vindication in the courts.

No one seeing Lanny Saybrook for the first time would pick him out as a celebrity lawyer. He looked more like a volunteer windshield-swabber from the Bowery. His suits were baggy, his shoes were scruffy, his ties were stained and askew. Tall and rawboned, he gazed out from glittering blue eyes over the slope of a bumpy, red-veined nose. From external evidence, he seldom if ever combed his wafting gray hair or cleaned his ragged fingernails.

As a patrician he was a bust. As a poker player he was mayor of Tap City. He specialized in inside straights, tipsy bravado, transparent bluffs, and losing.

But he was a tough lawyer, or at least a famous lawyer. He'd handled a host of *causes célèbres* since Stu Hodder hit the Hudson in '42. They included the defense of four washed-out Weathermen and a couple of Symbionese Liberation Army deserters. Some lawyers are ambulance chasers; Saybrook was a bomb-squad chaser. He had a sure instinct for headlines, and it paid off.

His latest newsworthy clients were members of the Le Moule terrorist group, a small but bloodthirsty band of killers whose dream required immediate independence for the French Caribbean islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique.

Two of the Le Moule group had been spotted by an alert waiter named Claude Dupré while planting a bomb in the men's room of a French restaurant on East 53rd Street. Had it gone off, the NYPD bomb squad figured that as many as 30 people could have died.

Clients like these were the ones who bared their souls and conspiracies to Lanny Saybrook, relying on his oratorical skills to keep them from pacing a prison yard somewhere. Saybrook, who was reputed to have more bugs in his midtown firm than Nixon had in the Oval Office, probably knew enough ugly secrets to fill Sing Sing on his own testimony. But it was all privileged information. Strictly confidential.

The mob-connected Bruno Riker, a patriot by his own lights, hated Lanny Saybrook. Borrowing some old epithets, he called

Saybrook a rich commie pinko liblab rat, and agreed to play poker with him only because Lanny S. seemed to have an unending supply of money to lose. Big Bruno liked free-floating cash even more than he hated rich commie pinko liblab rats. Even so, he sat as far away from Saybrook as the card table allowed.

But now Riker was gone from the game, the victim not of Lanny Saybrook—he'd outclassed him easily—but of Deuce Amboy.

I continued to deal.

Saybrook continued to lose. His best full house, jacks over tens, went down to Amboy's kings over deuces. The quixotic New York lawyer was beginning to look more than ever like a flophouse freakout. His eyes were bloodshot from fatigue and bourbon. His hands shook. Even his famous voice sounded raspy and petulant, not at all the booming courtroom baritone that had so often made up for his scarecrow appearance.

I'd heard that Saybrook was having money problems. It could have been true. He was having them in this poker game all right. \$35,000 isn't goobers even to a guy like him.

Lanny Saybrook, Deuce Amboy, and me. The players had dwindled down to a precious few.

Saybrook seemed ready to crack.

I was bone-tired.

Amboy was—well, he was Amboy, the little Vegas pro who'd come to win. He knew poker, he knew people. His preference in cards was five-card stud, but he could play anything, and play it heads-up, including Lanny Saybrook's favorite, jackpots draw.

Draw poker calls for sophisticated bluffing, and Amboy, with an eighth-grade education, could out-sucker most graduate psychologists. Playing against an erratic, plunging opponent like Lanny Saybrook, it was strictly no contest.

The game dragged on.

Now, at the eighteenth hour, when Lanny Saybrook's losses hit \$40,000, there came an unexpected break in the action.

Saybrook provided it. He pushed his cards away, cleared his throat, looked long and hard at Deuce Amboy, and said hoarsely, "With luck like this I could drop fifty kay before noon."

Amboy shrugged.

"I can afford it," Saybrook said in that aggrieved but superior tone of his, "but I'd like a shot at getting it back."

"I'm listening," Amboy said.

"Let's talk baseball."

That was Saybrook's opening. It was a well-known fact that Deuce Amboy would bet on anything that looked promising. You asked for it, you got it. The Deuce was a proposition bettor from way back.

"The Jersey Violets are six games ahead in the Eastern Division of the National League," Saybrook said. "The season is half over, and they're odds-on favorites to win the pennant and the World Series."

Amboy nodded. No argument there.

"Okay. That's the situation. Now, I'll bet you fifty thousand dollars, even money, that the Violets finish no higher than third in the Eastern Division. I'd guess they'll end up behind the Cubs and Phillies, but I won't specify that. I'll just say they finish no higher than third."

Saybrook's challenge brought an air of charged silence to the room. I looked out the window, watched the blazing lights of a 747 ascend to the heavens.

On the face of it Saybrook's bet was crazy. The Jersey Violets, although a recent expansion team, had quickly put together some of the best baseball talent money could buy. Free-agent players became millionaires overnight. "Green grow the Violets," the *Daily News* trumpeted, "all covered with dough."

And it was true. They were riding as high in the National League standings as that Boeing 747 that was now soaring in the Jersey skies. Last night they'd clobbered the Mets 14-0 at Shea Stadium, a typical performance. A team with pitching, hitting, fielding, and depth, the Violets would have to turn suddenly into bungling sandlotters for Lanny Saybrook to win his bet.

Never play another man's game, the pros always say. The good proposition bettor makes his own propositions, he doesn't bet on the other guy's, and Amboy was the consummate pro.

Still, I wondered how he was going to react to this one. His weasel-shrewd face showed nothing of his thoughts or feelings.

He took a long time answering. When he did answer, it was with a time-buying anecdote.

"Mr. Saybrook, I was once an Army recruit, naive and foolish, fresh from dealing blackjack for a bust-out joint in Steubenville, Ohio. I met a baby-faced corporal at Camp Knox. He was an innocent-looking kid, a nice kid. He offered to bet me a thousand

dollars he'd become a colonel within three months. I laughed. Ha, ha. From corporal to colonel in three months. It doesn't happen. I took the bet. Eight days later the legislature of Kentucky voted to make that young man, who happened to be a son of Fayette County's leading horsebreeder, an honorary Kentucky colonel."

Lanny Saybrook wasn't amused. He rasped, "You can take that bet on the Violets or leave it, Mr. Amboy. Suit yourself."

I didn't know what Amboy was thinking, but I can tell you this: I would have taken that bet in a minute. The Jersey Violets weren't going to lose the pennant, not this year. No way.

But Deuce Amboy wasn't in any hurry. He seemed puzzled. For the first time in the game he acted hesitant and a little shaken. He got up from the table slowly and said, "I'll have to make a phone call, Mr. Saybrook. Excuse me. I'll have my answer for you within fifteen minutes."

"Fair enough." Saybrook looked annoyed when he said it, but he poured himself more bourbon and leaned back to wait.

Neither Saybrook nor I spoke a word to each other as Amboy spent the next quarter hour on the phone in an adjoining bedroom. I watched the jetliners, one after another, rise in a symphony of lights, then disappear into the darkness.

When the little gambler returned to the table, his expression had turned from impassive to dour. He lit a cigarette and puffed away like one of the steam locomotives from his childhood. But when he spoke his voice was soft, almost soothing.

"I'll take the bet, Mr. Saybrook."

The two of them shook hands, Amboy enduring the ritual with a grimace.

After that Saybrook's luck at the poker table improved. He won back about \$4000, taking a big pot at daybreak on a diamond flush over Deuce Amboy's three queens. The turn of events should have given him heart, but instead he looked more and more bedraggled, more and more jittery as the hours wore on. He kept glancing at his wristwatch.

Deuce Amboy's vaunted alertness seemed to be fading. The little gambler's head nodded, his shoulders drooped.

The only thing that kept me going was a Saybrook-Amboy agreement made early on that the game would end at noon today, no matter what. Twenty-seven hours of poker. My dealing had lost a lot of its finesse, but nobody appeared to notice. After all, so had their playing.

At 10:05 the phone rang. I know the time because I checked my watch. At this point Deuce Amboy was periodically looking down at his watch right along with Lanny Saybrook. We'd become a trio of watch-watchers. I didn't have the foggiest notion why.

Amboy swayed to his feet, stumbled on a chair leg, found his way to the bedroom. This time I heard his voice, but I couldn't make out the message.

He returned to the table at once, and a wan smile played across his face. Deuce Amboy seldom smiled. He slumped down in his chair, haggard, but clearly relieved.

"Anything we should know?" Lanny Saybrook croaked.

"Yes," Amboy said quietly. "A news item."

"News item?" I caught a dull glint of anxiety in Saybrook's eyes.

"It's about the Jersey Violets."

Saybrook fingered his stacked poker chips carefully and said nothing.

"The Violets," Amboy went on, "were due out of JFK Airport this morning at 9:45, booked on Intercoastal Airlines Flight 17 to Miami. Quite often they fly charter, but this time they were on a scheduled flight. They're supposed to play the Miami Suns tomorrow afternoon."

I lit a cigar and exhaled a cloud of smoke.

Amboy went on. "A French diplomatic team was on the same flight. Two men and a woman. They had a connection in Miami for Guadeloupe. Their mission involved French government action against the Le Moule terrorist group. The airport security police acted on an anonymous tip."

Deuce Amboy was perspiring despite the air conditioning. He hesitated, thin-lipped. Finally he said, "It was my tip. The police searched the plane an hour before takeoff."

Lanny Saybrook took a long sip of bourbon, his frown fixed in place.

"I guess you know what they found in one of the lavatories, don't you, Mr. Saybrook?" Amboy put an unpleasant emphasis on the *Mr.*

Saybrook sighed, as if nothing Amboy might do or say could surprise him anymore.

"They found a bomb," Amboy said, looking steadily at the disheveled lawyer. "A bomb timed to go off in mid-flight, somewhere over the ocean, probably off the North Carolina coast. In the

Bermuda Triangle, I guess."

Then it hit me.

Saybrook *knew*. He knew about that terrorist bomb. He knew about it, and he had said nothing, not to the authorities, certainly not to us. Confidentiality. Privileged information. Good God.

Amboy said, "The police arrested two Le Moule terrorists in the Intercoastal Airlines terminal about fifteen minutes ago. They'll be charged with planting the bomb. I understand they're calling for their lawyer. Which means they're calling for you, Mr. Saybrook."

My opinion of Evan Lancelot Saybrook III, never very high, plummeted to a new depth. Sewer level. I remembered a social worker telling me about a junkie who killed a cripple for a welfare check. Here was something worse—a lawyer who was willing to let hundreds of people die for the sake of a stinking bet. Let them all die and turn a buck or two on the carnage. I muttered something about subterranean rats.

Deuce Amboy, as always, maintained a professional calm. He seemed to take it as just another case of a losing gambler's miscalculation. No moral judgment. Just the payoff.

"Do you want to settle both debts now, Mr. Saybrook?" he asked with perfect poise. "Or would you like to wait until the season ends to pay off that fifty thousand on the Violets?"

"Q"

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a NEW short story by

T. M. ADAMS

A complex and ingenious—what? Con job? No. Bank robbery? No. Ah—frame-up, that's it. And it is all the clever scheme of a man without a name, a person who doesn't exist, a "manipulator of the paper universe." Rapt reading . . .

PAPER TIGER

by T. M. ADAMS

66 **D**o you know what I like about you?" Mr. Anderson asked. "You think you can use me," I hazarded, signaling the waitress for another round of drinks.

"How can you say something like that? Why should I want to use you?"

"Because I've told you that I'm on no identity file in the country," I replied. "Because I am, in effect, an unregistered weapon."

"No, no," Anderson said, trying to look crafty after three double Scotches, and failing. "What I like about you is that you have initiative. I mean it. I really admired what you pulled—that business about getting to the computer that kept your grades? That was sharp."

"You had me thrown out of law school," I said.

"I was on the Board of Trustees, kid; I had to vote with the rest of them. You weren't cut out to be a lawyer anyway. You're a clerk. One look at you tells me that. Sorry, but you're a born clerk or accountant. Well, there's money in that, kid. With your brains and initiative, you could really clean up in—let's call it 'creative accounting.' As a matter of fact, I tried to get in touch with you after you were expelled, but they told me you were dead."

"I've already gone over that," I said slowly. "But I see you want to hear it again. Why? To see if I'll say it the same way twice? Okay, I'd messed up my life with that grades-boosting scandal, so I took that whole identity and threw it away. A man's identity is

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just a few pieces of paper nowadays, anyway. I wrote out a suicide note, faked a drowning, and started fresh. Oh, I've got a birth certificate—several of them, with different names. As a lawyer, you must know how easy it is to get a copy of someone else's birth certificate. Now, if the genuine owner of that certificate happened to die in infancy, whoever uses his name has a nice clean slate.

"So far, I haven't written on any of those slates. I prefer to have no identity at all. The rest of you citizens are filed away somewhere, subject to the computerized will of society. I'm one step removed from that process and ready to manipulate it. You see, Mr. Anderson, I've bowed to the inevitable. I *will* be a clerk, a paper pusher. Because in this paper universe, we clerks have a lot of push. And that's why you think you can use me."

Anderson smiled. He was a pear-shaped, balding man with watery blue eyes. His expensive clothes did not belong in a dive like this, but those eyes did. He smelled of crooked money. We had recognized each other across the room, even though we had only met once, a few years before in the Dean's office, and hadn't been introduced then. We recognized each other as types. I had been looking for someone like him and he had been looking for someone like me.

"Let's say I believe you," he said. "How do you live now? Without an identity, I mean."

"Saw an advertisement in the paper for a clerk at a travel agency. Looked the job over, let them get a good look at me, and said they weren't paying enough. I told them that I would take fifteen dollars less than they were offering, though, to do the job off the books. Payroll deductions eliminated, it meant more money for me and less for them to pay out. No tax return for me, either. No Social Security.

"I found some college students willing to illegally rent me the spare room in their dorm suite. No lease. I take the bus. No driver's license."

"Very impressive," Anderson said. Perhaps he wasn't so drunk after all. I knew he'd come here with a serious purpose in mind. "So you hang around bars, striking up conversations with strangers, looking for a job fit for someone with your talents."

"I can't put an ad in the paper," I said. "Neither can someone who needs me—like you."

"Stop saying that," Anderson said. Then, more quietly: "Can you get rid of somebody for me?"

"I don't see how I could have misled you," I said, after a moment. "The only rubbing out I do involves an eraser."

"I don't necessarily mean kill. Just get rid of," Anderson said. "You're the—what?—manipulator of the paper universe. Have him committed to a mental institution, or arrested for bigamy, or something."

"It's a thought," I said. "Why do you want this person, uh, gotten rid of?"

"He's engaged to my daughter," Anderson replied.

"My felicitations," I said.

"I do not intend for her to marry this man. He's a nothing. An ambitionless grifter. I don't mind the fact that he's crooked. What I object to is his lack of—you guessed it—initiative. Suzie's husband shouldn't float through life looking for handouts; he's got to grab with both hands."

I found all this hard to swallow. Anderson did not look like the protectively paternal type. I read him as a lawyer, with "shyster" written in the margin—the last man in the world to be concerned about the honesty and initiative of his daughter's suitor, or indeed, about anything but money and how much of it to declare.

"You object to the guy personally, or just to marriage itself?" I asked.

"The thought of my daughter marrying this spineless, no-account—"

"I was thinking that perhaps there might be a trust fund. You know, a fund that you administer for your daughter until she's of a certain age, or until she marries. I was thinking that perhaps there might be something like that."

Anderson opened and shut his mouth a few times.

"Mr. Anderson, you're not the sort of person who hunts up hit-men to protect a grownup daughter."

"Stepdaughter," he admitted. "She's a good kid and I hate to see this sponger marry her for her money, but he's free to do it—but not just now, that's all. Not until I've straightened out the books on the investments I've made out of Suzie's trust fund. You see how it is?"

"Yes. Give me her fiancé's name and address and I'll look him over. And I'll need your phone number."

Anderson eagerly wrote the information on a paper napkin and handed it to me. "The wedding's set for April. You have one month, Mister—you know, I've forgotten your name?"

"What name?"

Suzie Anderson's fiancé was named Derek Trescott, and he was a grad student at the same university where I had my room. I asked around about him and learned enough to confirm Anderson's estimate of his character. Apparently all the guy did was play poker with other students and use the winnings to buy research papers and test questions. I invested in a red wig and wore it to the regular Saturday night campus poker game.

Trescott was tall, dark, and handsome. He acknowledged there was room for another player, but kept giving me suspicious glances throughout the game.

"What major are you in?" he asked me, between hands. (You know, maybe you *could* send a thief to catch a thief.)

"Accounting," I said, and of course everyone believed that. Destiny is a merciless thing.

Stakes were moderate, and it took me nearly six hours to lose \$100 to Trescott. It was as much money as this game ever saw, and there were heated words when I paid by I.O.U. Still, I got out with a whole skin and a useful observation: Trescott borrowed a pen to score a side bet and never returned the pen. A common pen thief. It was a little thing, but it suggested my whole plan.

Monday I picked a bank far enough away from campus for me to assume that Trescott had never been there. Long ago I had altered the name and ID number on my old driver's license. I now used this document to open a checking account at the bank. Depositing \$15, I spent five to order the cheapest kind of personalized checkbook. They gave me some nonpersonalized checks, in case I wanted to write any before my checkbook arrived. On the way out I took a deposit slip from the slot in the main customer desk.

There was still a little groundwork to lay, but I was running low on funds. I called Mr. Anderson and arranged to meet him at the same bar Tuesday.

"I accept the commission," I said. "It will cost you two thousand dollars and some expenses."

He nodded.

"Good," I said. "Now here's what I want you to do. Get hold of

an unregistered gun. It's the only risky thing involved, and I'm not going to do it. A good place to look—"

"I've got one," he said. "You're going to handle it—in that way, then?"

"Don't be foolish. Here's the number of a bus locker. Leave the gun—a small one, I hope? good—in the locker ten o'clock Thursday morning, leave the key in the lock, and walk away. That way we won't have any other contact until it's all over. I'll meet you here Monday night. You'll pay me the rest then."

Wednesday morning. Taking care not to make too many purchases in one place, I bought stamps, stationery, envelopes, wrapping paper, and a small briefcase. A gift store supplied me with a very expensive gold fountain pen, which I loaded with a rather pansyish violet ink.

Next I wrapped up the briefcase and mailed it to the bank I'd visited Monday with the following cover letter, plainly printed in block letters:

I PICKED THIS BRIEFCASE UP BY MISTAKE WHEN I WAS IN YOUR BANK A WEEK AGO. I DON'T KNOW WHY. ALTHOUGH IT LOOKS LIKE MINE, I HADN'T BEEN CARRYING MINE THAT DAY. I CAN'T THINK WHY I DID SUCH A STUPID THING. IT WAS EMPTY WHEN I OPENED IT. PLEASE KEEP IT FOR ITS RIGHTFUL OWNER. IT LOOKS NEW.
TOO EMBARRASSED TO SIGN

Friday night. I had put in a full day's work at the travel agency. (Exhausting stuff. One of the new agents kept finding cheaper ways to send some clown to Rio de Janeiro, and I had to revise the week's balance sheet every time. I was sustained by the thought that I wouldn't have to do this much longer.) Tired though I was, I still had to spend a few hours perfecting a phony signature, then employing it. It was the last of the detail work, but I happen to like detail work. The hard part was coming up Sunday.

Sunday morning, after hanging around long enough to make sure Trescott was alone, I knocked on the door to his apartment. He recognized the red hair, but was surprised to see me.

"I've got to admit I'd nearly given up on that money you owe me," he said.

"Never give up," I said. "May I come in?"

"Yeah, I guess so. Do you have the money? Can you get it?"

I sat down on a faded green couch and said, "Yes and no. Yes, I have the money, and no, I can't get it."

"Run that by me again," Trescott said amiably, but his eyes were getting colder.

"I have a check for three hundred and seventy-five dollars. Unfortunately, the check is not made out to me."

"Again," Trescott said.

This part had to go just right. We both took patient breaths as I began: "Well, you see, my roommate, Charlie Butkis, owes me three hundred dollars. This goes back two or three months, and he is loaded with money, but he keeps stalling and stalling. The day before he's supposed to leave for Italy, his mother drops by and leaves him a check for three hundred and seventy-five dollars. I tell Charlie this is an ideal time to pay me back. He endorses the check, makes out a deposit slip for his checking account for the remaining seventy-five dollars, and tells me he'll go to the bank in the morning. Then he forgets all about it and goes off to Italy."

"What's your problem? He endorsed it, didn't he?" Trescott said. "You can make a profit if you want to. You endorse it below his name, take it to his bank where they'll recognize his signature, and they'll hand the whole sum over to you. Forget about the deposit slip. Owe *him* money for a change."

"Right, right," I said. "Except that I can't go into that bank. It's my bank, too, and I'm overdrawn. One of those no-bounce checking accounts where they lend you money if you go into the red, you know? They'd never let me walk out with that three hundred. They'd just credit it to my loan and say, 'Thank you.' But if *you* cashed it—"

Trescott sat down next to me and began to talk low and hard. "Don't give me any of this garbage. If Butkis had really endorsed the check, you would have paid some spare-change hustler five bucks to cash it for you, instead of paying a hundred bucks to have me do it. Something's funny about that check. Did you forge his endorsement?"

This was the key moment. (But I'd gauged the old pen stealer right. He was as crooked as his prospective father-in-law.) I feigned desperation and plowed ahead: "Okay, you see how it is. Enough money is involved so that they might try to contact Charlie to see if he had signed the check over to anyone. Even

though—and I'll show you some samples of Charlie's handwriting—even though the forgery is perfect."

"Great," Trescott said. "That's terrific. The forgery is so perfect that you can't cash the check and furthermore, nobody else can."

"Not quite," I said. "Charlie can."

"What are you talking about?" Trescott said, but I think he was beginning to see where I was headed.

"Charlie did all his checking by mail," I said. "He doesn't have a car, and the bank's not close. If he ever needed paper money, he'd cash a small personal check at the Student Union. I know for a fact he hasn't set foot in that bank since he opened his account two years ago."

"Now, suppose a guy the same height, weight, and coloring as Charlie, wearing glasses like Charlie does and you do, walks into that bank Monday morning. He stops at the desk, apparently endorses a check, fills out a deposit slip, then goes over to the teller. He says, 'And I'd like to deposit seventy-five dollars of it, please.' The teller looks at the check and the slip. The signatures are Charlie's. Wait'll you see them—they're distinctive. And by now every teller who works in that bank has seen that signature at one time or another, in the mail. Do you think that teller is going to do anything but hand over the three hundred? When a *deposit* of the better part of a hundred dollars is involved?"

"You mean me," Trescott said. "You want me to pretend to be Charlie Butkis."

"And you will be. She'll process the deposit, see that it's for a genuine account—which, by the way, has a couple of thousand dollars in it—and she won't have the slightest reason to suspect you. When you get outside, you give me my two hundred, and it's all over. No risk to you at all."

"No risk at all?" he asked (but he was hooked, I could see he was hooked). "Suppose she happens to ask for some ID anyway? She could. Then where would I be?"

"You'd be in the clear. Just identify yourself properly, say you're doing a favor for Charlie Butkis, and ask if *you* should sign the check, too. Nothing illegal there."

"Okay, but then they'd check. Like you say, it's a lot of money to be just signed over. They'll find out Butkis is in Europe."

"I doubt that; they'd probably just refuse the check. But even if it went as bad as you think, *you're* clear," I insisted. "You just pin it on me. Say I pretended to be Butkis. Who can prove otherwise?"

I'd be in trouble—not that Charlie would actually let me go to jail—but no one could blame you.”

“I don’t know,” Trescott said.

It took another hour to sell him. I showed him a letter purportedly written by Charlie, then the check and the deposit slip. Since they were all in an affected handwriting of my own, it was not hard to convince Trescott that the latter two signatures were perfect forgeries of the first.

It wasn’t anything I said that put it over. It was his own cleverness. By midafternoon he had increased his share of the take to two hundred dollars and agreed. Having “seen through” me, he was sure he had seen everything. He never guessed that that wonderful patsy, Charlie Butkis, was just a name from the back filing-cabinet of my mind, no real person at all, a paper man, the playing card of a clerk.

The talking had accomplished one last objective. While demonstrating the similarity of signatures, I used my expensive pen as a pointer, then managed to leave it carelessly on the coffee table. The next time I glanced in that direction, it was gone.

Monday, noon. I had told Trescott to meet me at a street corner near the bank. I arrived a few minutes early.

A flashy red foreign car pulled up to the curb and its elderly driver got out, crossed the street, and entered a medical building. Touched by a sudden inspiration, I stepped out of the sun and into her car. I was still sitting there when Trescott accosted me.

I will say this for him: he did not look nervous. “Give me the stuff,” he said. I handed him the check, the deposit slip, and the loose raincoat I’d bought on Thursday.

“What’s this?” he asked.

“It’s Charlie’s raincoat,” I said. “Carry it over one arm, the way Charlie always does. I know they’ve never seen him there, but it will give you the right mental attitude—and it will cover the way you put the deposit slip into the dispenser before pretending to pull it out. Remember, pantomime the whole business of writing out the slip. Verisimilitude.”

“Right,” he said, draping the coat over one arm with an irritated jerk. “Verisimilitude, mental attitude. Whatever. Let’s just get it over with.”

“Go in now, during the noon rush. Less chance that the teller will waste time checking on you.”

"Right."

I slapped the side of the old lady's car in a proprietary way. "I'll drive you back to school when it's over," I said.

"That's all right," he said. "My car's around the corner." He headed off into the bank. I got out of the car, took a bus across town, and never looked back.

"You don't have to understand what Trescott thinks he's doing," I finally told Anderson. "That whole paper chase I led him on has one purpose, to get him to hand that deposit slip to the teller.

"This is what will happen. He'll walk into the bank, he'll seem to write something on the slip, he'll approach the teller. The teller will look at the check and at the slip. Now, a deposit slip is really three slips bound together, the slip and two carbon copies. So the teller will flip the deposit slip over and rip off the second copy, exposing the back of the first. I used to work in a bank, summers; the routine never varies. The teller will be looking at the back of the second copy, and that's when she'll see the note written there."

"What note?"

"The note I wrote last night. The note Trescott has never seen, but which the teller will expose. The note says—I quote from memory:

"DON'T MAKE A SOUND. I HAVE A GUN. TAKE THE BRIEFCASE THAT ARRIVED IN THE MAIL AND FILL IT WITH FIFTIES AND HUNDREDS, AS MANY AS YOU CAN WITHIN THIRTY SECONDS."

"I get it, I get it, it's beautiful!" Anderson said.

"Wait, there's more: 'THE MAN IN THE BROWN SUIT WILL COVER YOU UNTIL I LEAVE. DO NOT GIVE THE ALARM AND YOU WILL NOT BE HURT.'"

"What's this business about a man in a brown suit?" Anderson asked.

"Don't interrupt. The man in the brown suit is a key figure, because he doesn't exist. The girl will give Trescott the briefcase and notice that there is no man in a brown suit covering her. Or, very probably, some other teller will notice her strange behavior. Or she'll start to question Trescott about the note, and with his guilty conscience he'll make a break for the door. Somehow, one way or the other, the guards will come down on him.

"Of course, he'll claim that the note was a prank. Somebody wrote it on a blank deposit slip and stuck it back in the dispenser, he'll say. But then they'll discover that Trescott's bank business is

phony, involving fictitious people. So they'll search him. I strongly suspect that they'll find the fountain pen that wrote both notes, with its distinctive purple ink. They will certainly find the unregistered automatic in the pocket of the raincoat he was carrying over his arm—"

Anderson was laughing. Not a pleasant sound, but one doesn't have to like everything about one's employer. I went on: "Now the tantalizing loose ends come up. 'Who was the man in the brown suit?' the police will ask. Trescott will say, 'I don't know what you're talking about. This redheaded guy owed me some money—' But they won't want to hear about that. 'Was he the guy in the brown suit?' they'll ask. 'Did he plan the job?' Along about this time Trescott will remember that he's seen my car. If he can describe it well enough—and it may still be parked there—it will be traced to a little old lady—"

"Stop," Anderson gasped. "Oh, stop it. It's beautiful, it's airtight."

"Hardly that," I said, "but beautiful, yes. The reality, what Trescott actually did, what he thought he was doing, what I did—all this is hopelessly confused. But the *report* of what happened, what the police can put on paper, what the newspapers can make out of it—this is clear as crystal. BANK ROBBER FOILED. In the real world, Trescott is a little punk. In our paper world, he's a tiger, and they'll be dying to pin something on him. The weapons charge, at least, should stick. One thing or another should delay his wedding plans at least six months."

"Long enough," Anderson said, pulling himself together. "And even if they go through with the wedding before it's all cleared up, there's that 'moral turpitude' clause—yes, that's most satisfactory."

"Of course, he may have chickened out before he even reached the teller."

"True," I said. "In which case, we have lost nothing but some time. We're still free to try some other form of attack."

"The evening papers," Anderson said. "They'll have the story if anything happened." He excused himself and left the bar, heading for the newsstand on the corner.

He came back a few minutes later. The newspaper in his hands was in a state of disarray; I assumed he had read it in the street. I did not like the look on his face.

"You jerk," he said, nearing me. "You overreaching nonentity. You—you clerk!"

He showed me the headline: DARING DAYLIGHT BANK ROBBERY NETS FIFTY THOUSAND.

"It's just not possible," I said again. "What could have gone wrong?"

"Nothing . . . went . . . wrong," Anderson said, teeth gritted. "There was even a man in a brown suit."

"A what?"

"Some guy in a brown suit. The police examined him and then let him go. At the time Trescott came in, this guy, who just happened to be wearing a brown suit, was standing to one side reading a loan application. The teller assumed he was keeping her covered and didn't sound the alarm until he left."

"While Trescott just . . . took the money! Didn't ask any questions, just took a briefcase full of fifties and hundreds and walked out? *And they haven't caught him?*"

"Nothing went wrong," Anderson repeated. "The police were busy chasing Charlie Butkis."

"There is no Charlie Butkis! I made him up, like the man in the brown suit—you know that," I said.

"There's a Charlie Butkis, all right, and he has an account at that bank—that chain, anyway. Naturally, the police thought there might be some connection between Butkis and the robber. So they did a little checking and found that this Butkis had an airplane ticket for Rio de Janeiro, leaving today—"

"The travel agency!" I said. "That must be where I picked up that name, where I work—he must have bought the ticket there."

"So, of course, the police pulled this poor clown Butkis off his flight and arrested him. He had an alibi, naturally, but in the meantime it is feared that the diversion has allowed the real robber to make his escape. End quote."

"It was that simple," I said, more to myself than to Anderson. "I could have done it. Myself. Fifty thousand dollars."

"Your perfect plan," Anderson said contemptuously. "Your paper universe. Your paper tiger." He emptied his drink.

"You know what this means, don't you?" he snarled. "We're accessories to a fifty-thousand-dollar bank robbery. No one could ever understand the truth, even if I could afford to admit it. We've committed your paper crime. We could be sent up for it!"

With that much money involved, this city is going to be crawling with investigators. If you left any loose threads—”

“Don’t worry about it,” I said. “I’ll take my two thousand and leave town. That will reduce the odds of anyone—”

“What two thousand dollars?” Anderson demanded. “Am I supposed to pay you for hanging the police around my neck?” He struggled to keep his voice down. “That two thousand would supply my only connection to the robbery. No way.”

“You can’t double-cross *me*, Anderson,” I said. “I don’t exist. I can’t be connected to any crime. *You* exist. You have a name. You have a daughter, a trust fund, some crooked books. *You* can be double-crossed. Unless I get paid off.”

“You’ll get paid off, all right,” Anderson said, burying one hand in the folds of his overcoat. I suddenly remembered how easy it had been for him to find an unregistered gun. “You said it yourself. You don’t exist. If you disappeared from this earth tonight, it wouldn’t register on any police blotter. Even your body couldn’t supply enough information to sustain a murder investigation.”

“Let’s not be morbid,” I said. “Calm down. If you just think about it, there’s no reason for us to quarrel. I got rid of Trescott, didn’t I? So what if he did pull off the job? I’ve told you how it looks on paper—he had no accomplices, except maybe some guy in a brown suit. Trescott’s probably safely out of the country by now. All we have to do is burn our brown suits and hope he never gets caught. We did our best for him there; with a little luck, maybe he’ll shoot it out with the police. Whatever he does, he’s not coming back to marry your daughter for her money. Actually, things couldn’t have worked out better.”

He regarded me blankly for a moment. Slowly he shifted his hand to another pocket within his coat, then withdrew it. He was holding a bulky envelope, which he passed to me under the table. “You’re right,” he said. “Here’s your two thousand.”

We drained our glasses. “It’s just the size of the thing that scares me,” he said. “That robbery, it’s so big. If it ever did come back to us—”

“Well, it’s your own fault, you know. If you hadn’t misrepresented the target to me—”

“What are you talking about?” he asked.

“Okay, you were right when you said Trescott is crooked,” I said, signaling the waitress again, “but you can’t say he doesn’t have initiative.”

a **NEW Dr. Basil Willing story by**

HELEN McCLOY

The Professor planned a perfect crime—the theft of ancient Greek coins worth as much as half a million dollars. He needed the help of Murphy, a night watchman at the Savoy, where the heist was to take place. The plan was foolproof because, as the Professor said, “An alibi isn’t a timetable. It’s misdirection, optical illusion, sorcery.” The Professor had another favorite maxim: “Crime is an art and art is the elimination of the unnecessary.”

Enter front and center, Dr. Basil Willing, psychiatric consultant to the Boston police . . .

MURPHY’S LAW

by **HELEN McCLOY**

Murphy was a slow reader, but there was one address he could always read at a glance on any envelope sent to him.

*Internal Revenue Service,
310 Lowell Street,
Andover, Mass. 01810*

Inside the envelope this morning was a computer print-out.

Dear Taxpayer,

Although notices and demands have been made for payment of your Federal taxes shown at the end of this letter, we have no record of receiving the amount due . . .

. . . enforcement action can be taken at any time after 10 days

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from the date of this letter without any further notice to you . . .

Salary or wages due you may be levied upon, as provided in Section 6331 of the Internal Revenue Code, by serving notice of levy on your employer. Bank accounts . . .

Murphy skipped to the last line.

Amount due

\$4,568.07.

The balance in his savings account was \$487.04.

Murphy crossed the hall to the Professor's room. They were fellow-travelers in old age because they both lived on the top floor of the decaying Governor Bradford Hotel. The single rooms, originally designed for chambermaids, were hot in summer and cold in winter, but the place had one advantage: the low crime rate at this end of Commonwealth Avenue. For that Murphy tolerated the petty regulations: no cooking, no pets, no guests. Like everybody else, he got round the first by using an immersion heater and his next-door neighbor, Miss Deluca, had broken the second by smuggling in a canary.

The Professor was frowning at a headline in the *Boston Globe*. "Sammy Bork acquitted again!"

"Doesn't everybody know he's guilty?"

"Everybody but this cretinous jury. Steal a thousand and you go to jail. Steal a million and you go to the Bahamas. That's where Mister Bork is going, or so he told reporters yesterday in his luxurious suite at the Savoy Hotel."

Murphy held out his letter.

"For me?" said the Professor.

"No, for me. I just got it downstairs."

The Professor was a quick reader. "Why didn't you answer the earlier notices?"

"I never got them. You know what the mails are."

"Isn't your tax deducted at source?"

"I thought it was, I guess it isn't. My job for Imperial Hotels, Incorporated is irregular. I just work when somebody else is sick or on vacation."

"That explains everything," said the Professor. "Imperial What-it didn't pay your tax because they regarded you as self-employed. You didn't pay your tax because you regarded them as your employers. This happens to a lot of people. Hospital nurses who take on occasional private duty. Italian construction workers

who do a little wood-carving on the side. Now you're liable for back taxes plus penalty and interest."

"How did the IRS find out?"

"They get stacks of letters from informers every year."

"Nobody I know would do a thing like that."

"Dear Murphy, you are a trusting soul. It's probably someone you see at work all the time. What is your work?"

"I'm a corporate security officer. That's the fancy name they have for a night watchman at the Savoy."

"Did you say Savoy? That's where Sammy Bork is staying now."

"Yeah?" Murphy wasn't interested. "I'd give anything to find out what it feels like to live without money worries."

"Anything? Ever read about Raffles?"

"That guy in London who turned crook and nobody guessed because he played cricket? You leant it to me last month."

"So I did. Has it ever occurred to you that it might be more fun to live a detective story than read one?"

"I don't get you."

"The *Globe* says Sammy Bork is putting money in ancient Greek coins as a hedge against inflation. He usually travels with a small album of his ten favorites. How much do you think ten coins like that are worth?"

"I dunno."

"Anything up to half a million."

"He must be nuts to take them around with him."

"No, he's just in love with coins. I understand because I used to collect early American coins. In those days I met one of those crank collectors who will buy any rare coin without asking questions. He's still alive and in business."

"So?"

"So I want you to think about something. We both need more money. At our age we're not going to get it by hard work. You have access to a hotel where there is a fortune in antique coins. I know a black market for such coins that's safe. This isn't coincidence. This is Fate."

Murphy was silent. He had already suffered a shock this morning. Now Mr. Hyde, who sleeps in all of us, blinked and opened his eyes.

The Professor went on briskly. "You know what floor Bork is on?"

"Eighth."

"You know the layout there?"

"Security officers have blueprints of all floors."

"Interested?"

"I'm listening. I wouldn't want any violence. As a watchman, I have to carry a gun, but I've never used it and I never will."

The Professor laughed. "Do I look violent?" He was in his seventies, slight and frail. "Bork may take off for the Bahamas at any moment. Why don't you use this morning to find out more about him? Just when is he leaving? Does he have a bodyguard? Is he keeping anything in the hotel safe? How does he usually spend his evenings?"

"I guess it won't do any harm to mosey over there and ask a few questions," said Murphy. "Then, if it don't look good, we can still call the whole thing off."

Murphy had forgotten that it is the first step that counts.

It was noon when he got back to the Bradford. "Bork's leaving for the Bahamas tomorrow."

"Then we'll do it tonight. When do you go on duty?"

"Seven. I'm on patrol mostly, but I have to call Harry, the guy who stays in the security office, every half hour from wherever I am. That's supposed to be for my own protection. Bork has a bodyguard, but he's only on duty when Bork goes outside the hotel. In the evening Bork has a routine regular as clockwork. Around seven he makes a beeline for the Blue Grotto, a bar on the mezzanine. At seven thirty he goes down to the dining room and usually gets back to his suite by eight thirty or nine."

"Any idea where he keeps his album?"

"I've known the maid on that floor for years. She says she came into his suite one evening to turn down the bed and saw him looking at coins. He was in the bedroom. She watched him from the sitting room. He didn't see her. She thinks he put the album away in a clothes closet."

"This is going to be duck soup." The Professor had a way of lapsing into the slang of his youth. "I'll be in the Blue Grotto at seven and hold Bork in conversation until he goes down to the dining room at seven thirty. I can bone up on Greek coins, at least enough to talk about them in a bar."

"And then we get the hell out of there?"

"God, no! That would be a confession. We must hang around for a while looking innocent."

"Suppose Bork checks his album as soon as he gets upstairs?"

"My job is to get him so blotto in the bar that he'll forget all about his coins until next morning. That shouldn't be too hard with a man who spends so much time in a bar every evening. I'll probably have to pour him into bed."

"But in the morning won't he suspect that you—"

"Nobody is going to suspect either one of us, Murphy. It will be just as if the Invisible Man had taken the coins. An alibi isn't a timetable. It's misdirection, optical delusion, sorcery. My alibi is the fact that I was in the Blue Grotto, in full view of Bork himself, while the coins were being taken from his suite. Your alibi is the fact that you were on patrol, calling your chum Harry every half hour while the coins were being liberated.

"It will look as if neither of us could have committed this crime separately. Therefore we won't be suspected as long as no one suspects any connection between us. If we run into each other by chance during the evening, we must meet as strangers."

"Then, even if I see you, I can't tell you if I've got the coins?"

"Use a simple code. Just say: 'The air conditioner is working perfectly.' If you haven't got the coins, say: 'The air conditioner is out of order.'"

"How do I let you know I've got them if we don't meet?"

"You don't have to. I'm going to rent a room in the hotel for one night and space in the hotel garage and a car. I'll give you the license number of the car and I'll leave one door unlocked. When you've got the coins, you can put them in the glove compartment."

"Will an album fit into a glove compartment?"

"Take the coins out of the album. I'll give you a tarnish-proof bag for them. Leave the album in Bork's suite. Then he won't realize the coins are gone until he opens it and that may give us extra time to get away."

"How do we get away?"

"I'll take off in my car with the coins around midnight and dispose of them in New York early the next morning. I'll leave your share of the money in a sealed envelope addressed to you at the Pan Am reservation desk at Kennedy. That way you can pick up the money without our being seen together."

"Won't the police know we were together when they find out we've both been living here at the Bradford on the same floor?"

"That won't matter if we're no longer here."

"Where are we going?"

"I've always wanted to go to Morocco."

"And I've always wanted to see Brazil," said Murphy. "But not to stay there forever."

"Isn't a little homesickness a small price to pay for a quarter of a million?"

"I guess so, but there's Miss Deluca—"

"There are a lot more like her in Italy. You can go there."

The Blue Grotto was a low-ceilinged room with just enough light to strike sparks from the row of bottles behind the bar. It took the Professor hardly a moment to spot Sammy Bork at one of the tables. There was no mistaking the narrow eyes, too close to a flat nose, and the wide, almost lipless mouth. They had been in the newspapers for weeks during his trial.

But who in hell was that woman? Murphy hadn't said anything about a woman.

She was more girl than woman. Her hair was silver-blond. She had the mild, absent air of a Botticelli angel, but she was dressed like a castaway in ill-fitting garments chosen at random.

A gleam of gold at her throat caught the Professor's eye, a coin on a chain so thin it was almost invisible. The coin showed a racing chariot in low relief, drawn by three high-bred horses at full gallop. A Winged Victory, bearing a laurel wreath, hovered above the charioteer. Only exquisite precision of eye and delicacy of touch could have made such an elaborate design work in such a tiny space.

The Professor had planned an oblique approach. Now he launched a frontal attack. "Syracuse?"

"Huh?" Bork frowned. "You from western New York?"

"Syracuse in Sicily. That coin design was once popular there."

"Oh, that Syracuse."

"My card." The Professor slid it across the table. It was an old card that named his university and said nothing about his being retired.

"Siddown, Professor. I'm Sammy Bork."

The girl smiled at him. "And I'm Amnesia."

"I don't believe it."

"Her mother called her Artemisia," said Bork. "Amnesia suits her better."

It did. She looked as if there were a lot of things in her life she was making herself forget, including Sammy Bork.

A waiter materialized out of the shadows.

"I'm having Scotch," said the Professor. "What can I order for you two?"

"Another stinger, please," said Amnesia.

Bork shook his head. "I don't drink. Ulcers."

The Professor felt as if a blow had knocked all the air out of his lungs. "B—but—" He looked at the empty glass in front of Bork.

"Ginger ale. One's enough. I just hang around here in the bar at cocktail time to keep Amnesia company."

The Professor needed his Scotch.

How in hell do you get a man drunk if he doesn't drink?

Murphy was opening the door of Bork's suite with his passkey. The stillness reminded him that he had forgotten to listen for sounds before opening the door. Was he losing his nerve?

There were two clothes closets, one filled with a man's clothes, the other with a woman's clothes. No sign of a coin album in either.

He had been searching for five minutes when he saw it in plain view on a table in the sitting room. Bork had escaped theft so long he was getting careless.

Murphy dropped the coins in the tarnish-proof bag. As he was closing the album, he noticed a document clipped to the front cover on the outside, a handwritten history of all ten coins. Documented provenance would add immensely to their market value, but, if he took this manuscript, Bork might see that it was missing the moment he walked in. If only Murphy could take the script without precipitating discovery . . .

What about that Xerox machine on the mezzanine floor? He could afford to leave the original script with the album if he had a copy of it.

He folded the script as flat as he could, but ten sheets of thick paper made an unwieldy wad, too big for the pocket of his jacket. His trouser pocket was bigger, but hard to get at. His gun kept getting in the way. He took the gun out of its holster and laid it on a window sill.

A footstep made him turn toward the door.

It was open. A man stood on the threshold, smiling.

"Did you know this door was ajar? I'm looking for Sammy Bork."

"He isn't here."

"Oh? He asked me to meet him here around this time. I'd better wait."

Murphy took a closer look at the man. Six feet of human male with such a look of dauntless authority that he could carry off a psychedelic necktie and massive cufflinks made of Victorian gold sovereigns. A doorman or a headwaiter would have loved him. Murphy was less easily impressed.

"I'm a security officer," Murphy said. "We don't allow unannounced guests. If you'll wait in the lobby, the desk clerk will have Mr. Bork paged for you."

Pink stained the man's cheeks. "I shall report you to the manager for insolence."

"What's going on here?" It was Bork, on the threshold now with the Professor and a girl behind him.

"Security, sir." Murphy looked straight into the Professor's eyes. "The air conditioner is working perfectly."

"The hell it is!" Bork strode across the room and snapped on a switch. There was an ear-splitting whine. "You call that perfect? Get a man up here to fix it at once."

As he shut off the noise, his glance fell on the man with the conspicuous cufflinks. "Hi, Jessup. Got something for me?"

"Yes, Mr. Bork. Something special. The oldest coin in the world."

"You serious?"

"I was never more serious in my life. The oldest Western coins we know are found in Asia Minor and dated no earlier than Sixth Century B.C. Hoard evidence indicates that this coin is Seventh Century B.C., or even earlier."

Jessup opened a small chamois bag. Could that blob of bright yellow gold be the oldest coin in the world? It didn't look like much to Murphy. It was rather like a lima bean, smaller and fatter than later coins. On one side was a rather crude head of a woman with little dolphins swimming around it. Jessup turned the thing over with one immaculate fingernail. There was nothing on the other side but a few rough lines.

"Incuse marks," said Jessup. "Of course no date is engraved on a coin this old. Dating depends on style and hoard evidence."

"How much is it worth?"

"My dear Mr. Bork, price is an accident of the market place. If this were auctioned, it might bring almost anything, but I'm willing to let you have it for a hundred thousand dollars."

The Professor spoke softly. "Why don't you auction it?"

Jessup gave him a look that would have killed a snake, then turned back to Bork with the blandest of smiles. "I'll leave the coin with you overnight, Mr. Bork, so you can study it at your leisure."

Bork noticed Murphy. "You still here?"

"I'm on my way out." Murphy started toward the door.

"I must go, too," said the Professor. "It's been such a pleasure, Mr. Bork. I do hope we may meet again."

In the elevator the Professor mopped his brow. "Whew! That was cutting it pretty fine."

"Why did you get in the elevator with me? I thought we weren't supposed to be seen together."

"Strangers can share an elevator. When you signaled me you had the coins, my mind went blank for a few moments. I just couldn't think of any pretext for getting out of there quickly. Thank God for Jessup. He'll keep Bork busy for a while now."

"And that'll give me time to make my Xeroxes," said Murphy.

"Xeroxes? What are you talking about?"

Murphy explained. The Professor didn't like it. "You're not going to try putting the original script back now trusting that Jessup will hold Bork's attention away from what you're doing?"

"Why not?"

"Crime is an art and art is the elimination of the unnecessary."

Murphy was hurt, but he didn't give way. "This is necessary."

"Then at least wait till I get out of the hotel."

The elevator stopped at the mezzanine floor. Murphy went down the hall to a public stenographer's office, now closed for the night, and opened the door with another passkey. He stopped before a complex and formidable machine.

"You know how to run it?" asked the Professor.

"A child can run these things." Murphy lifted a lid on a hinge and laid the first page of Bork's script down on a glassy surface. He lowered the lid and pressed a switch.

The machine clicked and groaned. A page of Xerox copy rolled out of a wide mouth in its side and then another and another. Clicks and groans became a sustained roar. The monster emitted page after page faster and faster. A blizzard of huge white flakes floated around the office and piled up on the floor in drifts.

"Shut it off!" cried Murphy. "Harry's office is on this floor. If he hears—"

"I can't." The Professor was pushing and pulling all the controls he could get his hands on. "Are you the Sorcerer's Apprentice? Did you set it for a thousand copies?"

"You can't set it for more than ninety-nine. Each Xerox costs a quarter. Do you think I want to waste a fortune on—"

The Professor dropped on his knees and jerked the extension cord out of its socket. A blessed silence fell.

"I'll get rid of these." The Professor was gathering up the Xeroxes. "Our fingerprints are probably all over them, so I'll take them down to my car. You wait here for ten minutes before you follow me out of this room. I still think it's vital that people don't know we're acquainted."

"Bork saw us together."

"He saw us meet apparently by accident. That's different."

"Oh, my God . . ." said Murphy.

"What now?" The Professor's voice was showing strain.

"I've just remembered another reason why I have to go back to Bork's suite. I left my gun on a window sill in his sitting room."

The Professor sat down with his head in his hands. "I should have known better than to get involved in a criminal conspiracy with a man named Murphy."

"Why?"

"Don't you know Murphy's Law? If anything can go wrong, it will go wrong."

When the telephone rang, Dr. Basil Willing was correcting proofs of his latest book, *Beyond Psychology*. He answered only because it might be his daughter, Gisela, now married and living in Lincoln.

"Father, you must help Emilia Deluca . . . a retired opera singer, who taught me music in my freshman year. The police are going to arrest the man she loves for murder . . ."

When Emilia Deluca arrived at Basil's apartment on Beacon Hill, she was dressed demurely for the interview—black suit, white blouse and gloves. She wore no hat and her soft dark hair had scarcely a trace of gray. Like most women who had anything to do with the stage, she knew how to stand, walk, sit, and speak. It was a pleasure to watch her.

"His name is Gerald Murphy," she said. "But Gerald doesn't suit him, so everybody calls him Murphy. He and his friend, Professor Allerton, are suspected of killing a coin collector."

"Sammy Bork?" Basil's morning paper had already told him that Bork had been killed by a bullet from a gun belonging to one of the hotel security officers, Gerald Murphy, who admitted leaving the gun in Bork's suite inadvertently. It was Murphy who had found the body when he came back to retrieve the gun a short time later. One shot had been fired and the bullet had penetrated Bork's forehead, killing him instantly.

There was only one reference to Professor Allerton. When asked by a reporter why he wanted to keep 50 or 60 Xerox copies of a history of Bork's coin collection in his car, he became incoherent.

"Now tell me what isn't in the papers," said Basil.

"Murphy and his friend, the Professor, concocted a lunatic plot to steal the ten rare coins Bork had with him at the hotel, all because Murphy was in arrears with his income tax."

"Tell me everything Murphy told you."

She did so at some length and ended with a sigh. "Thank goodness Murphy came to his senses when he found Bork's dead body alone in that sitting room and called the police without hesitating for a moment."

"What happened to the coins?"

"Soon after the police arrived they caught the Professor in the hotel garage just about to start his car. Bork's coins were in the glove compartment under some maps, but there was no sign of the other, more valuable coin that a dealer named Jessup had left with Bork on approval earlier that evening.

"What worries me is that neither the Professor nor Murphy has an alibi for the murder. Murphy was alone from the moment the Professor left him in that Xerox place until he called the police, a period of about ten minutes. The Professor was alone from the moment he left Murphy in the Xerox place until the police found him in the garage, a period of about fifteen minutes. Only Jessup has an alibi. The grillroom waiters remember his having a late supper alone in the grillroom at the crucial time."

"I distrust alibis," said Basil. "You can't rely on them to the last minute unless everyone concerned carried a stopwatch all the time. Those grillroom waiters weren't looking at Jessup every minute. If we probed, I'm sure we'd find that any one of these three men could have snatched a few seconds to shoot Bork. What about Bork's girl?"

"She says after Jessup went down to the grillroom, Bork began watching TV and she went into the bedroom and fell asleep."

"At eight in the evening?"

"When the police tried to question her later, they had trouble waking her. They think she was tripping on a combination of stingers and drugs. Bork was getting her the stuff from pushers he defended in court. She wouldn't shoot her only supplier."

Basil stood by the big window lost in thought. A sun-struck mist on the other side of the river made tall white buildings on the Cambridge shore shimmer like a mirage.

"What does this oldest coin in the world look like?"

"Murphy says it's bright yellow gold with a woman's head on one side and incuse marks on the other. I didn't ask him what incuse marks are."

"Let's find out." Basil found a book on numismatics on one of his bookshelves and read for several minutes. "Here we are. Incuse marks are rough marks left by the wrong side of a punch often found on the reverse side of primitive coins . . . Are you game to visit the scene of a murder?"

Emilia nodded. "I am tougher than you think."

As a psychiatric consultant to the Boston police, Basil Willing had made a friend of Captain Grogan. When Basil called Grogan now and explained the situation, Grogan suggested that Miss DeLuca and Basil should meet him and others involved in the case at the Savoy in Bork's sitting room.

Grogan met them at the door, looking discouraged. "No sign of Jessup's coin anywhere," he said. "If it's still in the hotel, it must be hidden in a tricky place."

"Then it must be a place where you wouldn't normally think of searching." Basil looked at Jessup. "May I see your cuff links?"

"Why not?" Jessup handed them over languidly without bothering to make the transfer easy for Basil by rising.

The tops yielded to the pressure of Basil's thumb, revealing hollows. The first was empty. Out of the second tumbled a small fat lump of gold.

"A woman's head surrounded with dolphins," said Basil. "Yours, Mr. Jessup?"

"Captain Grogan can hardly arrest me for hiding my own coin, can he?"

"No, but he can wonder why you hid it and allowed him to think it was missing."

"When the police brought all of us in here for questioning, I saw it had fallen behind the television set where I suppose they

missed it. As soon as I had a chance, I hid it because I didn't want it stolen like Bork's coins."

"Nonsense. You hid it from the police because you knew that if they had it they would ask some reputable coin dealer to appraise it and he would tell them that it was a fake and therefore evidence of your intent to perpetrate a fraud on Bork."

"Damn you." Jessup was on his feet at last.

"You didn't do your homework, Jessup. I did mine. You've been saying this coin dates from the Seventh Century B.C. or earlier, but no Hellenic coins made before the Seventh Century B.C. are made of gold. The earliest coins are made of silver or more often of electrum, the 'white gold' of the ancient Greeks, a naturally formed alloy of gold and silver washed out of Lydian rivers before Croesus."

"If that coin is a fake it can't be a motive for murder," said Grogan.

"Are you sure?" returned Basil. "Suppose that Bork as a large investor in old coins made it his business to learn something about them."

"Are you turning the case around? Suggesting that Bork was his own murderer as so many victims are?"

"It's not impossible," said Basil. "If Bork knew Western coinage at all, he would know that the oldest coin in the world could not be gold if it were genuine. The moment the others left him alone with Jessup, he would threaten Jessup with prosecution for fraud. To Jessup, a coin dealer, that would mean ruin—and there was Murphy's gun. Jessup would think of it as self-defense and hide the fake coin afterward because it was evidence of his motive for murder."

"But Bork and Jessup weren't alone together. The girl was there."

"Is she ever there? She's not called Amnesia for nothing. Her life is a perpetual trip. I doubt if she's aware of half the things that go on around her."

"So I had a motive," said Jessup. "But that doesn't prove I killed Bork—not if those waiters are still willing to swear that I was in the grillroom when Bork was shot."

"That leaves the Professor and me," said Murphy.

"No," the Professor interrupted him. "You and I have alibis, too. We were together, struggling with a berserk Xerox machine at the time."

"Not all the time," said Basil. "At your own request you left the Xerox place ten minutes before Murphy did. Why should we assume that you went straight down to the garage where the police found you later? You could have gone to Bork's suite first.

"There's no reason to assume you knew the earliest Hellenic coins were not made of gold. The only coins you had collected were early American. You must have thought Jessup's coin was as valuable as Jessup pretended. You told Murphy to stay in the Xerox room for ten minutes after you left, so you could go back to Bork's suite alone hoping for a chance to steal the coin Jessup had left with Bork.

"You were too old and frail to intimidate Bork with muscle, but you thought you could do it at gunpoint—Murphy's gun. Bork tried to disarm you and the gun went off.

"Murder was more than you had bargained for, so you ran down to the garage hoping you'd have time to get away. You never intended to leave half the money for Murphy at Kennedy. From the first your plan was to take off alone with all the money as quickly as you could. If things had gone as you planned, Murphy would never have seen you or heard from you again."

"No!" It was a cry of pain from Murphy.

The Professor turned to Basil indignantly. "What kind of man do you think I am?"

"The kind of man who would use a loyal innocent like Murphy for purposes of his own, however dangerous or criminal. It was common knowledge that Bork traveled with a coin album and stayed at the Savoy when he was in Boston. Did someone tell you months ago that Murphy worked at the Savoy? Something like that must have given you the idea in the first place.

"You had to have Murphy's help. You were shrewd enough to realize that you must give him an overpowering motive. So you stole the early tax notices that came to him at the Bradford where you were both living. When the time was ripe, you sent an anonymous letter to the IRS informing them that Murphy was in arrears with his taxes as indeed he was, thanks to you."

"Didn't Murphy get 1099 statements from his employers?" demanded Grogan.

"Of course not. The Professor suppressed them, too. All such notices come in envelopes with return addresses to identify them."

"And neither Imperial Hotels nor the IRS had any idea what was going on?"

"Imperial Hotels is a big chain. The IRS is even bigger. An error of omission can perpetuate itself for a year or so in such paperwork jungles without anybody noticing."

"I can't believe that the Bradford would hand over Murphy's mail to anyone else."

Murphy answered that one himself. "They don't with transients, but residents pick up each other's mail at the desk all the time. When I showed the Professor that final tax notice the first thing he said was: 'For me?'"

The Professor got life, not a long sentence when you are over 70. Basil visited him in jail to ask him one question.

"You had time to get away before the police caught up with you in the hotel garage. Why didn't you?"

"The car wouldn't start. Murphy's Law again. Some people call it the second law of thermo-dynamics, the eternal drift from order to disorder built into the structure of the universe."

The courts were kind to Murphy. Most people thought of him as a victim rather than an accomplice of the Professor. When he was paroled, a sympathizer found a new job for him and he started paying off his debt to the IRS who made the terms as easy as they dared. A month later he married Emilia Deluca.

Or did she marry him?

"Q"

N E X T M O N T H . . .

11 **NEW** stories—including

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Nick Velvet)

ISAAC ASIMOV (about the Black Widowers)

HUGH PENTECOST (about Pierre Chambrun)

MICHAEL GILBERT (about Mercer)

SEICHO MATSUMOTO (Japan's Number One mystery
writer)

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"
(in verse)

This is the 517th "first story" (this one in verse form) to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . A few reminders about the subject matter of this "story": Margaret Mitchell's GONE WITH THE WIND first appeared in 1936. It was an instant bestseller and made publishing history. The motion picture, an instant classic, premiered in the middle of December 1939, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was attended by Vivien Leigh (Scarlett O'Hara) and her fiancé, Laurence Olivier; by Olivia de Havilland (Melanie Wilkes); by Clark Gable (Rhett Butler), accompanied by his wife, Carole Lombard. Of the stars only Leslie Howard (Ashley Wilkes) was absent—he had returned to England to join the British war effort . . .

The author, Mae Z. Scanlan, is married, in her middle forties, and has two children, a son and a daughter. Mrs. Scanlan has gone back to work, this time at the School of Justice at The American University in Washington, D.C. as a staff assistant and editor of its newsletter. "My only problem," she advises us, "is finding time for my other interests, which include piano playing, song writing, swimming, bowling, stamp collecting, bridge, reading, and visiting Cape Cod with my husband" . . .

**THE GONE WITH THE WIND
MURDER CASE**

by **MAE Z. SCANLAN**

Georgia boasts a large plantation
Now decayed, but once the nation
Had no finer place than Tara,
Home of Mr. G. O'Hara.
Stately columns, rich décor.

© 1979 by Mae Z. Scanlan.

Persian carpets on the floor,
And tapestries of blues and reds
Wove legends in their tinted threads.
Gold imported chandeliers
Dropped crystal beads in seven tiers,
And paintings done by Raphael
Adorned the bedroom walls, they tell.
Southern breezes came and went,
Lush magnolias lent their scent.
Spanish moss hung soft and gray
From trees that knew de Soto's day.
'Twas no wonder G. O'Hara
Loved his lovely mansion Tara.

G. O'Hara had a child,
A shapely daughter. When she smiled
Men and boys alike succumbed
And swooned whene'er she spoke or hummed.
This beauteous creature's name was Scarlett,
Quite a tease, but not a harlot.
Just an inch she'd raise her skirt
(And eyebrows too, the little flirt).
Her suitors numbered more, let's say,
Than minutes in a given day.
They swarmed around her just like bees
On lawns and porches and settees.

With all that masculine attention,
Jealousy, I have to mention,
Reared its crude and ugly head
And left one noble suitor dead.

But first I think you ought to know
The names of some of Scarlett's beaux:
The Tarleton boys, a set of twins
Whose faces harbored sappy grins
Whenever Scarlett came in sight
(They really weren't very bright).
Then Tom, and Dick, and Harry too
Were part of Scarlett's retinue.
She flirted with them all, undaunted,
Pirouetted, flounced, and flaunted,
Rustled in her furs and silks
And saved her heart for Ashley Wilkes.

That was not the best of things,
For Ashley, after several flings,
Decided *her* he would not wed
And married Melanie instead.
Melanie, a kind and gentle
Soul, who turned folks sentimental.
Sweet as honey from the hive
Was Melanie (though lacking drive).

Life went on in Southern style
For little longer than a while,
When there appeared a handsome stranger
Wearing black, and breathing danger.
Charleston was this fellow's town,
A city which had gained renown
And reputation of a sort
For fleshly sins and evil sport.
Rhett Butler was the bounder's name,
And Scarlett O. became his game.

The crime took place one starlit night
When skies, and Tara, glistened bright.
A ball was held—a posh affair—
The cream of Georgia's crop was there.
Atlanta sent a swarm of swains,
Macon's group arrived on trains.
Rhett appeared, and Ashley too,
And Melanie in powder-blue.
The twins came in a little late,
While Tom and Dick showed up at eight
Followed close at hand by Harry,
Always trying not to tarry.

Many belles were at the ball,
But Scarlett, she outdid them all.
Resplendent in her silks and pearls
She was the loveliest of girls.
A pink camellia at her throat
Made men and boys alike take note,
And fawning were their lustful glances
As they begged her—please!—for dances.
Scarlett lapped it up like milk
And shyly smoothed her gown of silk.

Events went gaily for a time

Before the air was rent with crime.
The dancers danced, the talkers talked,
And there were some who strolled or walked.
Guests admired O'Hara's tulips,
Sipping, all the while, mint juleps,
Saying, in their Southern drawls,
This one was the best of balls.

(For everything that happens next
I veer from Margaret Mitchell's text.
The War Between the States I passed—
The subject matter's far too vast.)

In the crowd there was a man
Whom some folks called St. Louis Stan.
He'd heard of Scarlett while afloat
On a Mississippi riverboat.
A gambler, he decided he
Could win Miss Scarlett easily.
He postponed winning lots of lucre
In a floating game of euchre,
Took a train and coach to Tara
Where he met Miss S. O'Hara,
Scarlett of the raven hair,
A stunning lass beyond compare.
The air became electrified
When dashing Stan Miss Scarlett spied,
And he reacted just the same—
To make her his was Stanley's aim.
He doffed his hat, and bowed with grace.
He winked at Scarlett's beaming face.
She curtsied low, her lashes fluttered—
Not a single word was uttered.
Everybody gathered there
Thought "Oh, what a handsome pair."
The glove was down, the die was cast,
Here, indeed, was Love to Last,
But Fate designed another plan,
Scarlett wouldn't get her man,
For someone else, with evil bent,
Stanley to his Maker sent.

It happened when the clock struck ten,
Say those who know exactly when.
Dancers waltzed and minuetted,
Leaving partners much indebted.

Then—good grief!—a shot was heard
And people thought "Why, that's absurd."
But for the moment hearts were stopped
As bold St. Louis Stanley dropped.

He dropped at once, this natty guest,
A gaping crevice in his chest.
Scarlett blanched to see him hurt,
As scarlet blood adorned his shirt.
She knelt beside him, moaning low,
For Stanley was about to go.
He gave a long last gasp, and then
He left the mortal world of men.

The guests reacted with dismay
Not knowing what to do or say,
And what was once a Southern ball
Became instead a Southern brawl.
No one saw who fired the shot—
Who was guilty, who was not?
Where to go, and how to start?
How to mend a broken heart?

G. O'Hara, man of action,
Summoned Georgia's main attraction,
Someone in the world of Crime
Who caught the culprit every time.
He hailed from Jesup, near Savannah,
He was Top Police Banana,
Someone who was needed sorely:
Captain Beauregard T. Morley.

Captain Morley grabbed a bite
And left for Tara's halls that night,
Wherein he tried to make some sense
Of all the intricate events.
He had an interview with all
Who'd been invited to the ball.
He interviewed the servants too,
A wise and proper thing to do.
While sucking on some peppermints

He searched for clues and latent prints.
He even took a hansom cab
To check the town's forensic lab
To learn about the bullet's course
And how it traveled from its source.
He checked pathology for much:
Bleeding, time of death, and such.

Then this wily problem solver
Found the shiny black revolver
That had quickly cut the span
Of years for poor St. Louis Stan.
The weapon lay within an urn
Of dahlias, peonies, and fern.
The perpetrator ne'er suspected
It would swiftly be detected.
There it rested, thrown aside,
But Morley, he was eagle-eyed.

He had the corpse, he had the gun.
But motive? Why would anyone
Choose to slay a man so charming?
This the captain found alarming.
Could it be that unwise bets
Led to heavy gambling debts?
Or perhaps a jealous spouse
Had come to G. O'Hara's house?
Not a stone was left unturned.
He thought of all the suitors spurned,
The broken hearts that Scarlett caused,
And then the good detective paused.
He sighed a sigh and tapped his brow,
And said, "Ah thank Ah have it now,
Thuh rest will not be verrah hahd,
Oah else mah name's not Beau-re-gahd!"

On Wednesday night he summoned all,
And on the groups there fell a pall
As he announced, in language courtly,
He would name the killer shortly.
Could the villain have been Ashley?
Was it he who acted rashly?
Do you think sweet docile Melanie
Might be guilty of this felony?

Could, perhaps, a Tarleton twin
 Have perpetrated such a sin?
 What of Rhett? Could he have fired
 The shot that left a man expired?
 Could it be that Tom or Dick
 Fired the shot that did the trick?
 Maybe it's that fellow Harry
 To the gallows they will carry.
 Or did Scarlett, quick to grieve,
 Have the pistol up her sleeve?
 Morley had it figured out
 Beyond the shadow of a doubt.

But first I'd like to know if *YOU*
 Can solve this awful murder too;
 Take time to mull it in your head,
 And then I'll tell you what he said.

"Q"

Solution to

THE GONE WITH THE WIND MURDER CASE

by MAE Z. SCANLAN

Captain Morley stood up straight
 And let his words reverberate:
 "Don't y'all know, since Lord knows when,
 The butlers are the guilty men?"
 His verdict echoed down the hallways:
 "Butler did it, same as always."

DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

Richard A. Moore's debut in print, titled "Hard Luck Story," appeared in our July 1978 issue. We described the story as "a solid first effort showing considerable promise." Mr. Moore's second story is also a solid effort, and it realizes some of the author's considerable promise. The plot is grimmer this time, and paradoxically, more sensitive . . .

THE DEVIL BEHIND YOU

by **RICHARD A. MOORE**

He sat under the tree in the dark and stared at the illuminated stained-glass windows of the church. A few late arrivals were hurrying from the parking lot. A pair of high heels clicked up the sidewalk, the last of the faithful sounding off the final seconds. The door swung open, letting a shaft of light pierce the darkness, and then pneumatically hissed shut. The night service was beginning.

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow," the chant began, with the choir leading the way.

He watched all this from the edge of the woods, in his usual Sunday-night seat. He stood and automatically wiped the pants of his new blue suit. It would be an hour now before the service would end and his mother would be back to pick him up.

It was much darker under the trees and the pine-needle carpet muffled his footsteps. He could hear the whir of traffic on the highway beyond the church and a dog barking among the houses across the highway. The only nearby sounds were the twigs sharply protesting his steps.

He moved deeper into the woods toward a small stream where he liked to pass the time. It wasn't a great pleasure, sitting on the cool bank listening to the many sounds of the brook, but it was so much better than the inside of the glaringly lighted church.

Going to church was the only social activity in the dreary village, and the main service in the morning was enough contact for

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most of the congregation. Many made their living from the poor soil and the rest worked at the nearby state prison. It was a simple hard life, and most preferred to contemplate it in solitude.

The eight-year-old boy dreaded the lonely Sunday ordeal, but he had stopped questioning his mother's absence. He was shunned by the other church members and he knew it concerned his mother's past and the father he never had. At times he sat through the sermon, but the fear and tension that traveled through the crowd as they listened to the red-faced preacher frightened him. He dimly grasped the teaching of an ever-present danger of hell and damnation, but his young mind sometimes rebelled and he sought the quiet forest.

He could hear the breeze rustling the few remaining stubborn leaves. An occasional chill reminded him of the winter to come.

"Are you lost?"

The sudden voice shattered the quiet darkness and pricked the boy's heart into a racing flutter. He turned quickly and stared upward at the looming silhouette. The figure knelt, seeming to telescope back to normal size after its early exaggerated hugeness.

A round face, impossibly round, with eyes yielding space enough for several noses, although one was not immediately apparent in that vast area, leaned toward him. A mouth, large beyond belief as if it served double duty because of the minute nose, curved across the face like the world's last river after all else has eroded to pale desert.

"I say, are you lost, boy?"

Clenching bits of twigs and crushed leaves in his fists, the boy attempted to answer, but for the moment could only stammer. The gibbous face nodded with lips stretching another inch in smile.

"Where do you belong?"

The boy found his voice at last but it sounded awkward. "The church. I was at church." He pointed back over the hill from where the distant rumble of the preacher could still be heard working steadily toward the meat of the sermon.

Heavy deliberate laughter came slowly from the crouched figure, as if much more was imprisoned in the barrel chest but only a carefully measured portion was allowed to escape through those awful lips.

"Slipped away from church, eh? Slipped away to the woods."

The man gazed about the dark forest. "Couldn't stand to be cooped up, I'll bet. I can understand that. You'd rather visit with me than listen to the preacher go at it. Well, you found a kindred soul. I can't stand those Bible thumpers or close quarters either."

The man's huge face seemed to blot out the small amount of night light that filtered through the trees. The boy tried to stand, but the man put a thick hand on his shoulder and held him firmly to earth.

"Now where do you think you're going?"

The boy stared at the bulging forearm inches from his face. For a moment he seemed to be counting the coarse black hairs that with the movement of the breeze appeared to be crawling along the arm.

"I have to go back now. They'll be missing me."

The man laughed again. "No, son, you've made your choice. They wanted you and instead you came here to me and here you'll stay. I can't let you go now. We haven't got to know each other. I didn't ask for you, but maybe you can be of help." He tightened his grip on the boy's shoulder. "I hope so, boy, I really hope so."

All of the boy's suspicions were aroused. A terrible possibility occurred to him. When he spoke, his voice was tiny, made small by fear.

"Who are you? What can I do?"

The man settled himself, facing the boy, and moved his hand to grip a leg just above the ankle. "You tell me, boy. Who do you think you've found here in the woods?"

His leg felt like a small rope in the man's grip, but the boy spoke his heart. "I think you're the Devil." He trembled again. "I skipped church and you got me."

The last words were drowned in the man's laughter, louder this time. "The Devil!" He chuckled again. "I like that. You figured that out all by yourself in a minute of seeing me when it's taken others quite some time before they called me by that name."

He shook the boy's leg. "What do you think of this outfit?"

The boy stared closely at the man's clothing for the first time. He could see a loosely fitting white shirt and pants with a faded blue stripe along the legs. The dark shape of a pistol butt protruded from the waistline. "That's like what they wear at the state prison."

The man shook the leg in congratulation. "Right again. You are a wonder, boy. I've been in there visiting friends." The laughter

returned. "Yes, sir, I was just visiting with some good old buddies of mine who followed in my steps. Just visiting."

He leaned closer to the tiny figure. "But there comes a time to leave and my time came. As enjoyable as the company was to me, you can't expect me to stay there a lifetime. Sure you can't, but others might have different ideas. So here I am moving along at night and running into you.

"Now as to your help, boy. Well, I don't know right offhand but it will come. It will come. You keep real quiet and let's look at this church you left to find me."

The man retained a tight clasp on one arm, but he let the boy lead him to the edge of the forest. They stared across a lake of asphalt that surrounded the church. The light from the stained-glass windows revealed only a few dozen cars huddled close to the building. Sunday evening services were attended only by the elderly, the newly converted, and a handful of the always faithful.

It was hard for the boy to believe that minutes earlier he had purposely left such a safe warm place. He wanted to cry, but his fright was beyond tears. His small brow wrinkled with effort as he sought to radiate promises of everlasting goodness in the future for a bit of help in the present.

The man squatted beside him while the strangely emotional voice from inside the church washed over them unheard. Even when the man spoke an inch from his ear, the boy could not look at him.

"A pretty little church. Pretty. Not too large, but large enough for the faithful in a town this size. And large enough for me to find what I need to leave this place forever. I see some stairs there in the back, my boy. Do you know where they lead?"

The boy thought for a moment. "It's a little room for the singers, the choir. That's where they put on their robes."

The man tightened his grip on the boy's arm. "Perfect. Exactly as I thought, but it needed you to be sure. A nice little choir room where they ready themselves to sing thanksgiving. Do you remember seeing ladies' pocketbooks there? Purses, boy, where they keep their money and car keys?"

When the boy nodded, the man embraced him quickly before turning the child to face him directly. Inches apart, the boy could not see both the man's eyes without turning his head. The breath from the wormlike lips was overpowering. He quivered in the man's arms ready to faint, but the man shook him to attention.

"Now listen carefully, boy, for your life depends on you hearing and obeying what I'm about to ask of you." He turned his head slightly toward the church, as if to keep one eye there while the other remained tightly on the boy's white features. "Think of a lady in that choir, sitting just now behind the preacher, her hands in her lap waiting for the next hymn to be sung. Think of one in particular for me, boy, one who drives a nice big car you couldn't help but remember."

The man turned the boy back to face the knot of cars. "Maybe she drives that green one there or the black one next to it. Just pick out one that belongs to some nice lady you're certain is in the choir."

The boy thought for a moment before answering. "The black one. The big one. It belongs to the lady who plays the organ. But she dresses with the singers too."

"That will do nicely, boy. She doesn't have to sing. I'll sing for both of us for miles and miles. Now you, my little friend, must slip across to the church, up those stairs, and find the organ-lady's purse. Don't try to bring it all back. All I need are the keys. Her little fold of money would be a nice present, but that's just a suggestion. The keys are the thing."

The boy could not think. His mind swam with indecision while his body ached to curl on the ground and rest.

The man shook him with impatience. "You've got to do it! If you don't, I'll send you to Hell in a minute and you'll never see your dear mother again. Ah, what we do to little boys when we get them there! But I don't want to frighten you with that. Do this for me and I'll let you go back. You're a tough little one, I could see that right off, and smart. A little girl I wouldn't trust with this job. But you can do it and live to tell about it. The time you helped the Devil himself."

He turned the boy to face him again and that wide mouth folded into a line of determination. "You see this pistol, don't you, boy? Yes, I knew you had. As sure as I'm the Devil himself, I can pop your little skull with this gun and send you to Hell right now."

Tears blurred the boy's vision but he wiped them on his sleeve. "I'll do it. Just let me do it and go away. I won't ever skip church—"

The man interrupted. "Now that's all right. You do this little thing for me and you'll have the Devil behind you. Just don't

bang about and get yourself caught. No excuses. If you don't come back, I'll carry you away to where the sun never shines and little boys cry for all eternity."

After one final look at that terrible smile the boy lunged from the forest toward the church. He could hear the low laughter over the soft padding of his feet and the quick gasps of his lungs. The wind cut through his thin clothing to damp skin, chilling him thoroughly. He felt no relief as the distance from the strange awful man increased. The terrible, lonely responsibility was worse than the grip of certain death.

He hesitated a second at the bottom of the steps, listening under the preacher's loud exhortations for the sounds of other adults. Hearing none, he climbed quickly and slipped into the small room. Coats, sweaters, and hats dotted a score of folding metal chairs. He found the purses grouped together in a corner. It took just a moment to find the one he sought, a green leather one large enough to hold a small dog. A frantic digging uncovered the keys and he was quickly out the door and down the stairs.

He stopped at the edge of the woods, unable to see the man in the darkness. After a few tentative steps he listened carefully, but could hear only the night sounds of the forest. Relief was a moment from flooding his mind when he turned slightly and his eyes focused on the man sitting just to one side of the path. The boy was more shaken by the silent discovery than he would have been from a sudden gesture or noise. For an eternity of seconds they stared at each other without movement. The boy raised an arm, unclasped a fist, and displayed the keys.

A long even row of teeth appeared in the dark face. "Ah, the keys. Well done, my boy, well done. Now we must give them a try. And quickly, for this silence no doubt means the prayer at the end of the sermon. That leaves a verse or two of hymn, a benediction, and then swift sure discovery of your little theft."

He rose and stepped to the boy's side. "Perhaps we'll be lucky and a few lost ones will choose this moment to step down the aisle and prompt another verse or two."

"I can't go with you. You said if I—"

The man grabbed the boy by both arms. "Now, now. I know what I said. Just come with me to the edge of town. If I free you now, your hallelujahs might embarrass me in front of the congregation."

The man tucked the boy under his arm and his free hand kept

all screams and cries from escaping. As they crossed the parking lot, the boy, half choked and dazed with fear, ceased to struggle.

The car started easily and the man edged it slowly away from the church toward the highway. In a few moments the town was behind them and the man sighed with noise and apparent relish.

He watched the edges of the highway carefully. "Need a little road—a nice quiet road for us to conclude our deal."

The boy stirred in the front seat as the car left the highway and bounced in the ruts of a dirt road. His eye fell on the black grip of the pistol peeking out from the loose clothing, and a desperate hope was born. The man did not stop until the road ended at the ruins of a burned homestead. A bleached chimney tottered over the weeds.

The man turned toward the boy and sighed again. "You know, I make a pretty poor Devil. Up till now I've done my best with the role." He shook his head. "But I have to admit temptation came my way at last. I mean, boy, I was actually tempted for a moment to let you go."

The boy crouched in a corner as far from the massive figure as possible. His fright was bottled up and put away. His body tingled with alertness. One small hand slipped from a jacket pocket and crawled along the seat.

When he spoke, the boy didn't recognize his own voice. "You promised."

The man suppressed a laugh. "Sometimes I promise too much, boy. I did threaten to send you to Hell." The dark figure moved across the seat. "But since you were such a good little fellow, I'll send you to Heaven instead."

At the movement the boy deftly snatched the pistol and pointed it at the massive head. He saw the startled look on that hideous face as his finger searched for the trigger that was not there. Not understanding, he jerked back against the window, and in the moonlight stared with horror at the crudely carved piece of wood, covered with black shoe polish. The same moonlight gave him one final glimpse of that wide awful smile.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

CRIME RHYME

by MARJORIE Q. BOYLE

A character of Perowne who baffles
Is none other than the famous -----.
It doesn't take a clever dick
To know that Rafferty's dick is -----.
Could Mr. Satterthwaite really win
Without the aid of Mr. -----?
A motor vehicle plus an r
Adds up to Mr. John Dickson -----.
Served on a platter, sautéed if you wish,
Is Schlock's creator, Robert L. -----.
With Dutch as a clue it's a simple feat
To track down writer Lawrence -----.
Your mystery IQ is mighty low, pardner,
If you can't come up with -----.
A classroom (hark, the bell just rang)
Sets the stage for Mr. -----.
Petrella's creator's name is -----.
It rhymes with a nut which is called -----.
For the solving of mysteries the hub
Is Isaac Asimov's ----- club.
From a climate that's foggy and sometimes misty
Hailed the queen of Mystery, -----.
And last but not least, the first name is -----,
A clue is a vegetable known as -----,
For the last name royalty sets the scene,
(ENTER) king of Mystery, Mr. -----.

(for answers see page 130)

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by **OTTO PENZLER**

One of the most important reference books in the history of mystery and detective fiction is Allen J. Hubin's massive *magnum opus*, *The Bibliography of Crime Fiction, 1749-1975* (The Mystery Library/Publisher's Inc., \$59.95). What can you say about a single volume which contains the definitive list of every mystery book ever published through December 31, 1975? Only superlatives.

Hubin, winner of the Edgar Allan Poe award from the Mystery Writers of America last year for his ten years as editor of *The Armchair Detective*, the mystery world's leading critical journal, spent twenty years compiling information for this handsome tome, receiving the help of numerous scholars and fans to make it the most comprehensive list of its kind.

A decade ago, Ordean Hagen attempted a similar feat and produced *Who Done It?*, a remarkable achievement at the time, but a volume nonetheless filled with innumerable errors and lacking two-thirds of the books listed in

Hubin's *Bibliography*. Attempting to rectify that volume's shortcomings, Hubin began to run a more comprehensive and more accurate listing as a serial supplement to *The Armchair Detective*. As more and more data accumulated, it became clear to him that the material was at hand to produce the ultimate checklist of mystery fiction.

The Bibliography of Crime Fiction, 1749-1975 contains, as nearly as I can tell, more than 55,000 titles, listed in exemplary fashion. In a single alphabet of authors' names (as they appear on the books, with complete cross-referencing to pseudonyms and real names) are listed all titles under that byline, also alphabetically. Also provided with each listing is the name of the publisher of the English and American first printings, as well as important reprints. Additional information includes the names of series detectives (or crooks), a designation to indicate that a book is a short-story collection, and alternate titles.

Probably the biggest problem

faced by the compiler was the difficulty of defining crime fiction—the same bugaboo that haunts all critics and bibliographers in this far-reaching genre. Sure, crime fiction is a book or story in which a crime, or the threat of crime, is the central theme of the book—its *raison d'être*.

But what does one then do about westerns, for example? Surely the adventures of Jesse James in fictional form, and the countless sagas of stagecoach robbers and cattle rustlers are crime stories. But Hubin states that this is a genre clearly identified in its own right, and correctly denies admission to these novels.

Then what of such books as Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*? It is fiction of a kind, but entirely factual. The story, the plot, is true; its presentation is fictional. This makes it into the *Bibliography*. So do books about the Royal Canadian Mounties. Gothics, or romantic suspense novels, are a hazy area, with romance dominant in some books, and supernatural occurrences in others, and pure mystery in still others. Some get in, some don't. Adventure fiction has the same vague borderlines, and one can only imagine how Hubin must have agonized over the decisions about what had to be excluded.

Where are the flaws? As in any large reference book, errors of commission and omission are bound to occur, and this one is no exception, although the number is minuscule in relation to the amount of information it contains.

Anyone attempting this task would have his own approach, and so there must necessarily be subjective, judgmental decisions. I am dissatisfied with entries for such writers as M. E. Braddon and Mrs. Henry Wood, for whom Hubin has made no attempt to distinguish between their mystery fiction and their purely melodramatic tales.

Conceding the point that even a careful reading of some of these three-deckers would not have made a clear-cut decision possible, it should have been worth the effort for writers as important as these to list those which are clearly mystery stories, omit those which are clearly beyond the scope of this work, and list the dubious volumes with a mark next to the entry (as he has done for other borderline books). And, if you are going to list these writers, and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, how can you omit *Jane Eyre*?

With regard to clear-cut errors, the most frequent occur with short-story collections which are not so designated (although many are listed in Ellery Queen's *The Detective Short Story*): Harry Stephen Keeler's *Thieves' Nights*, R. W. Kauffman's *Miss Frances Baird, Detective*, and Barry Perowne's *Raffles After Dark* (U.S. title: *The Return of Raffles*), for example.

But this is the type of quibbling that does injustice to a masterwork. This monumental production is one of the two or three cornerstone volumes in any mystery

library. If Hubin doesn't win another Edgar for this book, the committee in charge of such things

should be impeached. Or forced to read the complete dime novels of Nick Carter.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by **CHRIS STEINBRUNNER**

The very first major theft from a moving vehicle—in 1855—is spectacularly celebrated in *The Great Train Robbery*, the new film by the Renaissance Michael Crichton, who directed his own screenplay drawn from his own best-selling novel. Having decided to write a true period adventure, Crichton was particularly intrigued while delving into the records "that many things we take for granted now were new then. Trains, for instance, had existed only since 1825. The 1855 robbery, therefore, was all the more startling because it was the very first in history from a train. Also, in those days robbers could not crack safes, only open them with keys, as dynamite and combination locks had not yet been invented."

How the charming, bearded rogue, Edward Pierce (Sean Connery), aided by his coolly beautiful friend (Lesley-Anne Down of *Upstairs, Downstairs*), makes off with the four keys needed to open an impregnable safe containing a fantastic gold shipment destined as pay for Crimean soldiers is lightheartedly detailed in a film with a winning Victorian look—

made in Ireland because that country has retained the Georgian appearance of England in the 1850s. Not only is elegant London with great banks, mansions, clubs, and Crystal Palace recreated, some of its poverty, squalor, and crime is detailed as well: Newgate Prison during a public hanging, and the "Holy Land," a dense, dark, twisting slum even the "crashers" (police) fear to enter. The climax of the adventure is a suspense-filled ride on a handsome, steam-breathing locomotive train, a joyous caper engineered by a sly mastermind (Connery's best role in years) you hate to see thwarted. *The Great Train Robbery* reminds one of those Ealing Studio gems made during the golden age of British comedy—in which an engaging mob plots a heist and just might pull it off. A first-class-carriage ticket.

It is now possible to hear some of Dashiell Hammett's contributions (however indirect) to that vanished medium, radio, thanks to recordings pressed from archivist transcripts. The Lux Radio Theater's version—broadcast over CBS in 1936—of the 1934 film *The Thin Man*, in an album now made avail-

able by Radiola in their good crime series, is a delight to the ears. William Powell and Myrna Loy are in their original roles, backed by a cast of 16 and a full studio orchestra sawing away, and the peppery host is the film's original director, W. S. Van Dyke, giving wry insights into its making. (Theda Bara is even a between-the-acts added attraction!) The one-hour presentation captures much of the fun of the feature, and follows the script closely. Les Tremayne and Claudia Morgan play a no-less-urbane Nick and Nora in a *Thin Man* episode for 1948 (a radio series spin-off from the films), in which they take a witty, bloodless excursion into New York's "underworld" searching for a prizefighter's kidnapped dog. Hammett's complementary creation, *The Fat Man* (in which each show started with the sounds of scales trod, and the ominous "Weight: 237 pounds . . .

Fortune: danger!") solves a murder seen through an apartment window—and the solution turns on a bit of misdirection radio could do best (1947). Most charming of all is the glib, lovable Sam Spade (the broadcast, with Howard Duff and produced by William Spier, is from 1949), who toils through four fights to bring "The Apple of Eve Caper" to its solution, letting neither gangsters nor molls distract him from the affections of his loyal secretary, Effie (enchantingly played by Lureen Tuttle). The warmth of the relationship between these two, the genuineness of Effie's concern over oft-bruised Sam as he reaches for the bottle in his desk (hardly ever mentioned but we hear the *clink*) in a misty, crime-laden San Francisco, betrays Hammett's toughness but is still a superior listener. More of the radio Spade should be dug up. As Sam would say, end of report.

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THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Though several worthy new novels are discussed below, this month's highest recommendation goes to a quartet of reprints. To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Ellery Queen, New American Library has made the first four EQ novels available in new paperback editions (\$1.75 each)—*The Roman Hat Mystery* (1929), *The French Powder Mystery* (1930),

The Dutch Shoe Mystery (1931), and *The Greek Coffin Mystery* (1932). Their intricate fair-play construction makes most of the current works that pass for formal detection seem thin gruel indeed.

As the years went by, Queen the writer developed and improved in style, characterization, social consciousness, and thematic concerns, but the unique

mastery of mystery plotting achieved in these first four novels could only be maintained. It was beyond improvement. I wonder how many millions of readers are as thankful as I am that the dramatic season of 192- began in so disconcerting a manner.

*** Donald Zochert: *Murder in the Hellfire Club*, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, \$8.95. Benjamin Franklin, previously cast as Great Detective in Theodore Mathieson's *The Devil and Ben Franklin* (1961), here solves a locked-room murder in London of the 1750s. There is also a very nice Queenian dying message to be worked out. The historical detail and atmosphere (well suggested by Manny Haller's Hogarthian dust jacket) are beautifully done. Though not quite yet another John Dickson Carr, Zochert is a welcome new practitioner in the classical form.

*** Bruce Cook: *Sex Life*, M. Evans, \$9.95. A mysterious double killing, introduced in the opening pages and solved at the end, serves as a framing device for a series of flashbacks to the life of one of the victims, ad man John Gawlor. These chapters could stand alone as short stories, and the whole novel, though producing a certain sense of *déjà vu*, is a work of sure-handed and impressive craftsmanship.

*** John Coyne: *The Piercing*, Putnam, \$8.95. A young (and, needless to say, sexually struggling) priest investigates a hill girl's apparent stigmata in this first novel, an absorbing occult tale with some of the intense readability

of *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Exorcist*, and *The Mephisto Waltz*. Well read occult fans will pick up early on some fairly obvious clues to the outcome.

*** Michael Delving: *No Sign of Life*, Doubleday-Crime Club, \$7.95. This is probably the final novel about American antique dealer Dave Cannon, since Jay Williams, the prolific writer behind the Delving pseudonym, died last year. Understandably, Cannon's later British buying trips have lacked the freshness of his first (the memorable *Smiling the Boy Fell Dead*), but the puzzle, including a nice dying message, is one of the author's best.

*** Alice Cromie: *Lucky to be Alive?* Simon and Schuster, \$9.95. Young woman joins household of famous reclusive artist to tutor nine-year-old, encounters mystery, danger, romance. This successful first novel of a well known reviewer reminds me very much of Phyllis A. Whitney's work. For many readers, no further recommendation will be necessary.

*** Bob Langley: *The War of the Running Fox*, Scribners, \$6.95. This solid and fast-moving thriller, set in England's Lake District, involves Rhodesia, the I.R.A., and a daring theft from a British atomic plant. This is the second well crafted action story from Langley in a little over two months—the other, *Death Stalk* (Doubleday-Crime Club, \$7.95), presents similar environmental concerns and scenes of outdoor pursuit and survival.

*** Peter McCurtin: *Minnesota*

Strip, Belmont-Tower, \$1.75. New York dick Pete Shay, neither very heroic nor very likeable, is closer to Mike Hammer than Lew Archer but ultimately unlike either. Is McCurtin trying to write the most cynical, downbeat, and depressing private eye novel ever? Whatever he's doing, he's doing it with great skill.

*** Paul Spike: *The Night Letter*, Putnam, \$9.95. Typical of the current rash of "faction" is this what-if thriller about a plan (possibly Nazi-backed) to ruin F.D.R.'s bid for a third term through release of compromising pictures of him with his mistress. There is some question about the taste and morality of this kind of thing, but this is a well written and suspenseful example of the genre. (Other Real People that appear: Harry Hopkins, Cordell Hull, Henry Ford,

and J. Edgar Hoover—what political thriller would be complete without him, or a recognizable stand-in?)

** Elizabeth Lemarchand: *Suddenly While Gardening*, Walker, \$7.95. Tom Pollard's latest case is from a long line of straightforward, low-key, competent English detective stories, with a windup not quite thrilling enough to justify the rather leisurely trip.

** Ron Rosenbaum: *Murder at Elaine's*, Stonehill, \$7.95. This satirical account of murder at New York's fashionable literary hangout is a trendy, all-surface novel, the kind that seems hopelessly dated in a few years. There are a few laughs but no detection to speak of, and along the way Rosenbaum (for no good reason) gives away the solution of a famous mystery novel and film.

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DETECTIVERSE

HELL HATH NO—

by GLORIA ORLICK

Disdaining my heart, my lover left.
Should I be angry or be bereft?
Fury resolved in every way,
My darling lies beneath parquet.
Ah, 'tis tender and ever sweet
To have my lover—at my feet!

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[ADVERTISEMENTS]

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Coughlin, William J.	THE STALKING MAN	Delacorte	8.95	6.95
Coyne, John	THE PIERCING	Putnam	8.95	6.95
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Jackson, Jon A.	THE BLIND PIG	Random House	6.95	5.50
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Markstein, George	THE GOERING TESTAMENT	Ballantine	8.95	6.95
New, Christopher	GOODBYE CHAIRMAN MAO	Coward, McCann & Geoghegan	8.95	6.95
Rippon, Marion	LUCIEN'S TOMBS	Doubleday	7.95	6.35
Spike, Paul	THE NIGHT LETTER	Putnam	9.95	7.95
Thomas, Ross	THE EIGHTH DWARF	Simon & Schuster	9.95	7.95
van de Wetering, Janwillem	THE MAINE MASSACRE	Houghton Mifflin	8.95	6.95
Watson, Hilary, ed.	WINTER'S CRIMES 10	St. Martin's	8.95	6.95
Yorke, Margaret	THE COME-ON	Harper & Row	8.95	6.95
Zochert, Donald	MURDER IN THE HELLFIRE CLUB	Holt, Rinehart and Winston	8.95	6.95

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TRIAL AND TERROR

by **HAROLD Q. MASUR**

66 **Y**ou testified, Dr. Weber, that you were engaged by the plaintiff to remove her appendix."

"Yes, sir."

"Had Joyce Owen previously been a patient of yours?"

"No, sir."

"Who referred the case to you?"

"A colleague, Dr. Mitchell Bass."

"And you performed this operation at Manhattan General?"

"With the help of an assistant, yes."

"An assistant—ah, yes—we'll come to that later. It was an emergency?"

"That is correct."

"And how much did you charge Mrs. Owen for your services?"

"Objection," I said. "Immaterial and irrelevant."

"Sustained," said the judge.

The plaintiff's attorney, Herman Carp, spread his hands in a sweetly reasonable gesture. "If it please the court, I merely wish to show that Mrs. Owen was entitled to the exclusive services of the surgeon himself, not some inexperienced intern. After all, for the exorbitant fee of twenty-five hundred dollars—"

I was on my feet at once, angrily flagging the bench. "Your Honor, this is intolerable. Time and again Mr. Carp has circumvented the rulings of this court. He demeans the judicial process, makes improper demands—"

© 1979 by Harold Q. Masur.

"Yes, Mr. Jordan. I am instructing the jurors to disregard Mr. Carp's statements. Counsel for both sides will please approach the bench."

There was bile in my throat. Precluded by the rules of evidence, Carp had nevertheless managed to inform the jurors of Dr. Weber's fee. And the judge's instruction of course was nonsense. Only through a collective attack of amnesia could they disregard a remark already heard. The judge, an interim appointee, indecisive and forbearing, administered another mild rebuke and got back an apology about as genuine as a politician's handshake. With bland innocence Carp claimed misguided zeal in promoting his client's cause.

His client, Mrs. Joyce Owen, was suing Dr. Fritz Weber for malpractice. Some months back, at 3:00 a.m., she had suffered an acute attack of appendicitis. Her own physician was in Bermuda on vacation. Her husband, sensing the emergency, had summoned Dr. Mitchell Bass who lived in the same building. Bass quickly appraised the situation, got her to a hospital, and by morning the laboratory had confirmed his diagnosis.

"This one can't wait," he'd told the husband. "We have to go in there as soon as possible. If I may, I'd like to recommend Dr. Fritz Weber, an excellent surgeon on the staff here."

Albert Owen had agreed, and after a brief consultation with Weber, Mrs. Owen had been wheeled down to the operating room. Since Manhattan General was a teaching hospital, Weber had permitted one of his interns to make the initial incision. From a cosmetic standpoint it was a ghastly error, resulting in an unsightly scar on an otherwise quite spectacular body. Photographs had been exhibited and Mrs. Owen had testified that she would never again be able to wear a bikini.

It was Carp's position that a substantial fee, demanded and paid in advance, entitled Mrs. Owen to the exclusive expertise of the surgeon, not of his assistant, certainly not of a beginner. It was Weber's position that what he had done was standard procedure in teaching hospitals.

I was inclined to agree with the opposition. But Weber, a long-time client, was in a ticklish spot. He was a tight man with a buck, and skyrocketing premiums had prompted him to drop his malpractice insurance. Perfectly asinine for a man in his profession. I was hoping, if possible, to keep any judgment against him within reasonable limits.

Now the judge glanced at his watch. He tapped his gavel. "Court is adjourned for the day, gentlemen. We will reconvene tomorrow morning at ten o'clock."

Weber stepped down and joined me at the counsel table while I collected my trial brief. We left the courtroom together. He was a slight thin man, almost frail, with tired sparrow-pockets under his eyes and long supple fingers.

Carrie Weber, his wife, a small anxious woman with a tendency to fuss over her husband, was waiting for us in the corridor, as she had been each day of the trial. She was accompanied by Dr. Mitchell Bass, a burly man of brusque mannerisms. He and Weber had been roommates at medical school and they were close friends.

Bass buttonholed me. "Look, Jordan, you were supposed to put me on the stand today. What happened?"

"Couldn't be helped. You'll be reached tomorrow."

"In the afternoon, please. I have office hours weekday mornings from nine to twelve."

"Right after lunch."

Weber said, "You won't need him after tomorrow, will you, Scott? He has to spend some time with his accountant. The poor fellow is undergoing a tax audit."

"I'll do my best. But I hope you're free this evening, Bass. I'd like a little more preparation for both you and Fritz for tomorrow's session."

"I'm free."

"I have an idea," Carrie said. "Let's all go back to the house for dinner. It's the maid's day off, but I can thaw some steaks."

It was agreed and we headed for the elevator. We had taken less than a dozen steps when Weber veered away with a sharp exhalation. I turned and saw Albert Owen wrenching at the doctor's arm, a huge fist cocked and ready to go, Owen's big florid face distorted with anger. Bass and I lunged simultaneously. Bass pinned one arm and I got a half-Nelson on the other.

He weighed over 200 pounds and it was like waltzing with a gorilla. I had met Owen in Herman Carp's office during an abortive attempt to settle Weber's case. A choleric, unpredictable man with a foaming temper, he had sat glaring murderously at the defendant since the beginning of the trial. Hearing Weber's testimony on the stand must have lit the fuse.

I applied pressure. "Easy does it," I said soothingly. "Simmer

down. We're saving you from a charge of felonious assault."

Joyce Owen came around and planted herself in front of her husband. She looked him sternly in the eye. "That's quite enough, Al. We don't need any more trouble. I want you to take me home."

Carp took a handful of his client's lapel. "All right, Counselor. You can let him go now. He's under control."

"Keep him here until we get into the elevator."

Outside, we hailed a cab, one of the big ones with a jump seat. Weber was still pale and shaking. Bass said, "The man's a menace. He should be kept in a strait jacket."

Carrie appealed to me. "Can't you get a court order or something to keep him away from Fritz?"

I shrugged. "Some of the jurors saw that little scene. It can't hurt our case." Deliberately I changed the subject, looking at Bass. "The tax boys giving you a hard time?"

He nodded morosely. "Just had to sign a declaration of net worth."

"What's that?" Carrie asked.

"A sworn statement listing every asset a man owns in this world."

"Did Fritz sign one when he had his audit last year?"

"He did indeed."

"Well, it didn't help," Carrie said. "They have all sorts of deficiencies and assessments against him. He's still paying."

Naturally, I thought. If the doctor had filed honest returns he wouldn't have any problems. The tax people had made him as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a roomful of rockers.

The cab pulled up at an East 65th Street townhouse. Weber's office was on the ground floor, his living quarters above. Carrie headed for the second floor while the men hung their coats in the hall closet. I was tossing my hat on the shelf when we heard the scream.

I took the stairs three at a time with Bass and Fritz at my heels. The bedroom had been ransacked. Carrie was staring in dismay at an empty velvet-lined box. "My jewels," she wailed. "Oh, Fritz, all my lovely jewels are gone."

Weber blinked, turned without a word, and hurried down the stairs, Bass and I following. The glass panel of the medicine cabinet in his office was shattered. He ignored it and bent over his desk. One of the drawers had been pried open. He rummaged

frantically, looked up, and said in a strangled voice, "Good Lord, it's missing."

"What's missing?" I asked.

He hesitated, swallowed hugely. "A six-months' supply of drugs."

Bass was appalled. "Are you saying they got everything, Fritz, *all* of it?"

Weber nodded miserably, reached for the telephone, and blurted out a report to the police. Then he went back upstairs and gave Carrie a sedative. By the time he came down again, two plainclothes detectives had arrived. They listened, commiserated, took notes, prowled, and found that a kitchen window looking out over the backyard had been forced. They wanted to see insurance policies for descriptions of missing items. They would notify pawnbrokers, alert informers, check out addicts, and keep an eye on known fences. They made appropriate suggestions about better security and more efficient locks.

After they were gone, Weber sent out for sandwiches. Both doctors munched without enjoyment. "It's not the end of the world," I said. "Carrie's baubles were insured. They can be replaced."

"Not all of them," Weber said. "Some were family heirlooms."

"In the meantime," I said, "we have to think about your appearance in court tomorrow. So settle down, gentlemen, and let us consider the probable line of Mr. Herman Carp's cross-examination."

I had reason the next day to feel satisfied. Carp alternated between his usual silky innuendo and biting sarcasm, but both doctors acquitted themselves well, avoiding traps and framing their replies carefully. After Bass stepped down and left the courtroom, I completed the testimony of two more witnesses and that wrapped up the day's session. Almost immediately a visitor came forward and joined Weber and me at the counsel table. It was Detective Schatz, grinning broadly.

"Waiting for you to finish," he said. "Good news, gentlemen. We have apprehended the perpetrators and recovered the loot."

"All of it?" Weber asked.

"The lot, Doctor. Everything. We need you down at the precinct for identification. I have a city vehicle outside."

"Will you come along, Counselor?" Weber asked me. "I'm out of my element in these matters."

I agreed because I was curious. In the car, Schatz told us how it happened. A pair of young addicts had read about the Owen lawsuit. They knew that Weber would be in court, that his wife attended the trial, and that yesterday was the maid's day off. They broke in, rifled the doctor's office, and then almost as an afterthought decided to have a look upstairs. The jewelry was an unexpected bonus.

"With a little more experience," Schatz said, "they coulda been rich. All they had to do was lay low and fence the stuff out of town. Instead, this morning they walked into a hockshop and tried to unload a pair of earrings. The pawnbroker checked the pieces against our bulletin, stalled, and phoned the squeal. We had a prowler car on the next block and in three minutes the collar was made. There was no resistance. We found out where they lived, searched the premises, and located the rest of Mrs. Weber's jewelry."

It was waiting for us, laid out on a table in the squad room. Weber fingered each piece and kept nodding morosely. His lack of enthusiasm was explained a moment later when Schatz produced a manila package, opened it, and dumped bundles of currency across the table.

"Imagine," he said. "Seventy thousand dollars. In cash. And all yours, Doctor. The perpetrators found it in a locked drawer in your desk."

Weber was staring at the bills as if mesmerized.

"You never mentioned the money," Schatz said evenly. "I wonder why. And why it was never deposited. A big-number item like this oughta be kept in a bank."

Weber found his voice, but it lacked conviction. "I—I needed cash for a business deal." He fumbled with the bills, trying to repack the money.

"Sorry, Doctor." Schatz shouldered him politely away from the table. "You can't have it back so soon. It goes to the Police Property Clerk for safekeeping. We need it for evidence against the burglars."

Weber moistened his lips. "Can they do that, Counselor?"

"They can," I said. And I knew what ailed him. Dr. Fritz Weber had a problem. Not all patients pay their medical bills by check, so a lot of cash crosses a doctor's desk. If he doesn't deposit it, there is no record. And without any record he may be able to avoid income taxes. A risky piece of business because now there

was no way to sidetrack publicity. When a quick efficient collar is made, the Department is not likely to play it down. They're always hungry for a favorable press.

Which is precisely what happened.

The next day it was in all the papers. The *News* trumpeted details in a headline. The *Times* gave it half a column on page three. The *Post*, an afternoon paper, dispatched a photographer for a shot of Weber when he appeared at court for what proved to be the final session of the Owen case.

One last witness and closing arguments followed. I summed up. Carp summed up, the judge delivered his charge, and the jury retired to deliberate.

Weber and I went out to lunch, but he had no appetite. Half an hour after we returned to the courtroom, word came down that the jury had reached a verdict. The judge appeared, shrugging into his robe. The jurors filed into the box, and the foreman announced the verdict.

As expected, they had found for the plaintiff. But what was totally unexpected was the size of the judgment. \$2500. Exactly the size of Weber's fee. He slumped down into his chair with relief. Albert Owen, restraint gone, leaped to his feet and started purging his fury in shrill obscenities. The judge rapped his gavel and directed the attendants to remove Owen from the courtroom. Carp grimly demanded a poll of the jurors. The clerk called the roll and the judgment held. Carp moved to set it aside as inadequate. When the ruling went against him, he announced his intention to appeal. Joyce Owen stood beside him, stunned and crestfallen.

I gathered my papers and hustled Weber out through a side door. We had lost the case, but in a way that demanded some sort of celebration. We crossed Foley Square to a dimly lit tavern. The modest judgment and a double bourbon boosted the doctor's spirits. He managed a smile and assured me that I was the best lawyer in the city. And he wondered if it might not be advisable to hire a bodyguard until he was sure that Albert Owen meant him no harm.

He ordered another drink and looked up to watch the closing minutes of a hockey match on the television screen above the bar. When the game was over, a newscaster appeared. There was a brief bulletin about the Middle East, followed by an item that instantly dissolved Weber's mild euphoria.

"The case of the two young men charged with breaking and en-

tering the home of Dr. Fritz Weber took a new and surprising twist late this morning when the Justice Department entered the picture. An Assistant United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York filed a restraining order on the Police Department prohibiting it from returning the seventy thousand dollars recovered from the burglary.

"This action was taken at the request of the Internal Revenue Service which holds a lien against the doctor's assets because of previous tax deficiencies. According to our informant, the Intelligence Division of the I.R.S., which conducts criminal investigations, will be taking a very close look at the doctor's records in order to determine whether fraud charges should be lodged . . ."

Weber, his blood-drained face at half-past six, sat immobile, his expression martyred and bleak. I could almost read his mind. He was contemplating the prospect of a criminal indictment and the possibility of becoming an unwilling boarder at some federal penitentiary.

He shook his head sadly. "I need you more than ever, Counselor."

"This is a tough one, Fritz."

"I swear to you I have not doctored my books."

"So how did you accumulate seventy thousand dollars cash since your tax audit last year?"

"You have to stop them from grabbing that money."

"You haven't answered my question. The seventy thousand, Fritz?"

"Don't press me, Scott, please."

"I can't help you without some logical explanation."

"You're entitled to one, but not right this minute." He clasped his hands in supplication. "I beg you, Scott, buy me some time. That's all I ask—a little time."

I sighed. "All right, Fritz, I'll try. But I don't think the government is going to be satisfied with new assessments. I think they have every intention of processing you into the slammer just to set an example for every other professional who might be tempted to cheat on his tax returns."

"I need another drink."

"Booze won't supply the solution. Go home and sort your papers and make an appointment for me with your accountant. In the meantime, I have work to do."

I left the tavern and found a pay phone. I made some calls and

learned that the government had not only filed a restraining order against the police department, but was moving quickly to file every lien, attachment, and remedy in the books against Weber's bank accounts and any other assets they could find. The character in charge of the government's case was a young Assistant U.S. Attorney whose name, so help me, was Clarence Darrow, and whether or not this baptismal conceit was responsible for his choice in a profession, I had no way of knowing.

He answered his own phone. On the horn his voice sounded brisk, aggressive, and knowledgeable. "Ah, yes, Scott Jordan. I've heard about you and I knew you were involved. That's why I'm covering my flanks."

"You've blocked the doctor's bank accounts. How do you expect the man to function?"

"Not my problem. Orders from D.C. How can Washington function if people finagle their taxes?"

"You're persecuting him."

"Not persecuting. Prosecuting. There's a big difference—you know that. And what did he expect? He lied on his declaration of net worth last year. So add perjury to all his other problems. You want some advice, Jordan?"

"Not particularly."

"I'm big-hearted. You can have it anyway. Plead your client guilty and throw him on the mercy of the court. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm busy." The line went abruptly dead.

I went back to my office and considered Weber's problems. The government, it seemed, had a lock on the doctor. It would take a legal Houdini to free him. Since young Darrow was providing no opportunity for a compromise settlement, I had to come up with some innovative maneuvers. It brought to mind a quote by a brilliant lady lawyer, Fanny Holtzman, who had routed some of the most formidable members of the bar: "I don't follow precedent. I establish it."

A most worthy objective. And what I came up with had me smiling while I dictated to my secretary. "Give this priority," I told her. "I want these papers drawn and ready for service before five o'clock." It was a motion to vacate the government's restraining order, its liens and attachments, returnable Thursday morning before Judge Lucas R. Coleman at the U.S. District Court-house. And I was hoping that my supporting affidavit would give young Clarence Darrow a restless night.

Carrie Weber phoned several times, worried about Fritz. He had sunk into a state of deep anxiety and was doping himself heavily with sleeping pills.

Thursday morning, promptly at ten, I stood in Judge Coleman's courtroom, ready to argue my motion. Clarence Darrow stood beside me—Ivy League, brush-cut, brisk, supremely self-confident, sporting a Brooks Brothers suit and a Gucci briefcase.

The judge studied the papers, peered down over his pince-nez, and said, "As I understand it, Mr. Jordan, your motion is directed against these attachments on grounds that they violate your client's constitutional rights."

"That is correct, Your Honor. Under the Fourth and Fifth Amendments."

"Clarify, if you please."

"The Fourth Amendment guarantees Dr. Weber freedom from illegal search and seizure. The Fifth protects him from being compelled to testify against himself. Obviously the government intends to use these seized assets as evidence against my client in a criminal prosecution."

"Mr. Darrow?"

The Assistant U.S. Attorney smiled. "While I admire my esteemed colleague's ingenuity, Your Honor, I fail to see how his arguments apply. The assets in question were illegally seized by the burglars. Now Mr. Jordan claims violation of the Fourth Amendment. But the government has initiated no illegal search. On the contrary, we have applied to the appropriate tribunal for a court order in every instance."

He paused, eyes wide, arms spread out. "As to the Fifth Amendment, the government does not ask the doctor to testify against himself. We say let him stand mute, his tongue sealed, huddling under the protective cloak of our great Constitution. We say that protection does not extend to the money. We say let the seventy thousand dollars testify against him."

Judge Coleman is not noted for joviality, but he could not repress a chuckle. He beamed approval at young Darrow, then looked down at me and shook his head. "It will not be necessary to take this matter under advisement. Motion to vacate is denied."

I shrugged and left the courtroom. Darrow caught up with me in the corridor and said patronizingly, "Not your fault, old chap. You really didn't have a leg to stand on."

Maybe not. But I did have a pretty good leg with a fair-sized foot at the end of it that was itching to take off in the direction of the prodigy's seat. I restrained the impulse and walked away.

All right. You win some, you lose some. Maybe Perry Mason scores every time at bat, but Perry Mason is the figment of a writer's imagination. In real life a lawyer doesn't always find himself on the side of the angels.

The problem, however, was academic. As it turned out, there wasn't one single thing they could do to Dr. Fritz Weber. He was now beyond the government's reach. I got the bulletin when I called my office for messages. Mrs. Weber had phoned from Manhattan General, weeping, almost incoherent. Her husband had fallen from a tenth-floor window in the surgical recovery wing. I was to meet her there in the director's office.

I left the booth and waved at a passing cab.

She came lurching out of a chair, her face tear-streaked, and fell into my arms. I murmured consoling words and when the trembling subsided I sat her down again. "How did it happen, Carrie?"

"They're saying Fritz killed himself. But I know my Fritz. He was depressed, yes, but he wasn't suicidal. Only this morning he scheduled two operations for next Monday. Would he do that if he intended to kill himself?"

I knew only that Fritz Weber was a man very close to the edge of his endurance. His reputation was tarnished by the Owen malpractice suit. And the U.S. Government, with all its awesome power, charging tax fraud, was inexorably tightening the noose.

No one, Carrie told me, had seen Fritz turn a bend in the corridor to enter the empty room with its wide-open window. But one of the nurses had seen Albert Owen emerge from the elevator on that floor and she had spoken to him. He had told her that he was looking for Dr. Weber. The police had been informed and were investigating.

That changed my opinion about suicide. "Who's in charge?"

"A man named Nola."

The door opened on cue and he marched in—Detective Lieutenant John Nola. A slender precise man, a career cop of sharp intelligence, a friend since the day I'd first hung up my shingle. We shook hands and he sat behind the director's desk, apparently preempted for the investigation.

"I understand you represent the deceased, Counselor. What I have so far is sketchy. I need more background."

"You know about Albert Owen?"

"Only that he held a grudge against the deceased and that he showed up this morning looking for him."

I put him more fully into the picture, informing him of Owen's violence and the attack on Weber in the courtroom corridor. As a member of the Department he already knew about the \$70,000 and the government's claim.

"Was there any sign of a struggle?" I asked.

"None visible. But the deceased was not a powerful man and if someone had decided to help him out the window, I doubt if he could have put up much resistance. We have an APB out on Owen and he should be here any minute. You knew Weber, Counselor. Is it possible he took his own life?"

"Dr. Weber was under severe emotional pressure and I don't know at what point his stress mechanism might fail."

"It would never fail," Carrie said staunchly.

There was a knock on the door and a uniformed patrolman looked in. "A Dr. Mitchell Bass, Lieutenant. Says he's a friend of the widow."

"Yes," Carrie said. "I want him here."

Bass, wearing a white laboratory jacket, went directly to Carrie and she leaned against him and started sobbing again. When she ran dry, he turned to Nola.

"I don't buy any suicide theory, Lieutenant. Fritz Weber was my closest friend and I'm telling you straight out there was nothing that could have induced the man to destroy himself." Bass looked at me. "What happened in court this morning?"

"No luck. We lost the motion."

"Did Fritz know?"

"Not from me."

"Well, it wouldn't have made any difference anyway. He could have handled it. That lunatic Albert Owen, is it true he was here, up on the tenth floor, looking for Fritz?"

"It's true."

He swiveled. "Why the hell aren't you bringing him in, Lieutenant?"

His answer came from a sudden commotion at the door. It flew open and Detective Schatz, with his partner's help, bulled Albert Owen into the office. Owen, wrists handcuffed behind him,

sported a shiner, a bruised jaw, and a rip along the shoulder seam of his suitcoat. Both detectives were breathing hard and showing considerable wear.

"Who's in charge here?" Owen demanded.

Nola identified himself.

"I'm lodging a complaint against these two Cossacks, Lieutenant. Police brutality. Pulling me in without a warrant. I'm going to sue this city until it's bankrupt."

Schatz said, "Self-defense, Lieutenant. We identified ourselves and he started swinging, so we had to use a little persuasion."

"Remove the cuffs."

They complied and Owen rubbed his wrists.

"You are not under arrest. You were brought here for questioning."

"About what?"

"The death of Dr. Fritz Weber."

"Oh, no. You're not going to tag me. I want to use that telephone."

"Go ahead."

He dialed. "Carp? Al Owen. I'm at Manhattan General. In police custody. I think they're setting me up for the death of Fritz Weber. Move. On the double." He hung up and glared balefully. "You, Jordan! Why are you here?"

"Weber was a client of mine. I'd like to know whether he fell or jumped or was pushed out of a window."

"That's your reason. What's mine?"

"The lieutenant would like you to explain why you came to the hospital this morning and why you were on the tenth floor at the same time Dr. Weber met his death."

Owen glanced at Carrie Weber, saw the aversion in her eyes, tightened his lips, and stared up at the ceiling. He folded his arms across his chest. He would say nothing more until his lawyer arrived.

Carp's eyes made a circular sweep of the room and focused on Owen. "Who clubbed you, Al?"

"These two cops."

He looked at Nola. "Are you charging my client?"

"Not yet. We will if he doesn't tell us why he came looking for Dr. Weber this morning."

"You were here at the hospital, Al?"

"That's what they say."

"I'd like to confer with my client in private."

"Take them to the supply room across the hall, Schatz, and wait outside."

Schatz convoyed them. Carrie's face suddenly convulsed like a baby's in torment. She hugged herself, rose quickly, and headed for the door, shaking her head when Bass started to follow. He looked grim. "That Owen doesn't have a full deck. I'm ready to vote for capital punishment."

In five minutes Carp returned with his client. "Okay, Al, tell him."

Owen's heavy face had a pinched look. "Weber phoned me this morning, early. He offered to pay a substantial sum of money over and above the amount of my wife's judgment if we agreed not to appeal the malpractice case. In cash. No lawyers. Just the two of us. If I was interested I could meet him on the tenth floor of the hospital at ten o'clock. I thought, why not. So I agreed. Look at all that loot he had stashed away in his desk."

"You recognized his voice?" I asked.

"He was whispering. He said his wife was in the next room and he didn't want her to know about it."

Nola's eyes sought mine. He wanted a signal. Did I think it possible that Carp had just now cooked up this explanation? Carp, I knew, was no saintly ornament of the bar, but subornation of perjury? I gave him a noncommittal shrug.

"You have any proof Weber called?" Nola asked.

"What proof? A tape recording, for God's sake? I told my wife about it."

But any statement by Joyce Weber in support of her husband would be suspect. Nola rubbed his chin and said, "Read the man his rights, Schatz."

I was frowning while Schatz intoned the ritual. He was almost finished when I had a sudden intuitive flash. Albert Owen was no fool. Had he appeared at the hospital with murderous intent, it did not seem possible that he would have told a nurse that he was looking for his victim. Fresh conclusions percolated and surfaced.

Carp said, "That's it, Al. Clam up. No more cooperation. Let them try to make a case."

"Read those rights again," I said quietly. "This time to Dr. Mitchell Bass."

The doctor's head snapped around. He gave a long and challeng-

ing look. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about *your* presence here in the hospital this morning."

"What's wrong with that? I'm visiting patients."

"On a weekday morning? When you're supposed to keep office hours from nine to twelve?"

His voice altered. "Not today."

"Then I assume your appointment book shows no appointments scheduled at your office."

"I—I told my nurse to cancel."

"Good," I said. "Admit everything that can be proved. You're concerned about your tax audit, aren't you, Doctor?"

"Of course. So what?"

"So you signed a statement of net worth and you failed to include the sum of seventy thousand cash. Money you had squirreled away to avoid paying income taxes. You knew they were suspicious of your records and you were afraid they'd apply for a warrant to search for a double set of books or other evidence, so you asked Weber to hold the money for you until you were in the clear. He was your friend. He agreed. And then the unexpected happened. The money was stolen. It was recovered. It became a news item. And the I.R.S. clamped down on Weber."

"There is no basis for such an assumption."

"I saw your face, Doctor, and I heard your voice the afternoon that Weber discovered his desk had been plundered. And I remember your words: 'Are you saying that everything is missing, Fritz, *all* of it?' So you knew that your money was gone, even though Weber tried to cover for you by misleading me into thinking you were talking about drugs."

Nola broke in. "If that seventy thousand belonged to Bass, why didn't Weber speak up and get the government off his back?"

"Precisely, Lieutenant. That is exactly what Bass was afraid of. He knew that Weber was a frail reed, beleaguered on all sides, with fraud charges imminent, desperate for a solution. Even so, Weber kept trying to find a way to save his friend, putting me off until he could discuss it with Bass. But there was no solution and he could not be expected to take the rap, not when the stakes were so high. Bass saw that Weber was coming unglued and about ready to blow the whistle. Which meant that Bass himself faced a criminal indictment and the very real possibility of prison. So to save his own hide, he decided to shelve his best friend."

"Then it was Bass who phoned Owen."

"No doubt about it, Lieutenant. It was totally out of character, inconceivable that Weber would initiate a meeting between himself and Owen. The man terrified him. Owen was bitter and irrational about Weber, and he had a history of violence. Which made him the perfect pigeon, custom-tailored for a frame. Bass himself, in a white lab jacket, a familiar figure in the hospital, could move about without being conspicuous. When the time came, when he knew Owen was on the tenth floor, he lured Weber into an empty room. One blow would prevent any outcry. I would not be surprised if he had reserved that particular room for a patient who would be checking into the hospital later today. You might inquire about that, Lieutenant."

It drained the blood out of Bass's face.

Nola said, "Are you telling me that he would never claim the seventy thousand dollars, that he was willing to sacrifice it?"

"It was gone anyway, Lieutenant. Back taxes and penalties would have gobbled it up. The only salvageable commodity was his own skin. Everything else was expendable—his money, his best friend, Albert Owen—"

Owen lunged, growling. It took Schatz and his partner and Herman Carp to bring him down and hold him on the floor. Dr. Mitchell Bass did not seem to notice. His voice, trailing the end of a long breath, was urgent, scaling into falsetto.

"I want my lawyer."

"Q"

Answers to Crime Rhyme

Raffles
Chick
Quin
Carr
Fish
Treat
Erle Stanley Gardner
Strang
Gilbert, filbert
Black Widowers
Agatha Christie
Ellery, celery, Queen

the second story in the **NEW** series by

JULIAN SYMONS

Howard Carey was not a sophisticated man—indeed, he was easily shocked by certain facts of life. Despite his 53 years he had remained comparatively innocent and naive. The world is a difficult place for a man like Howard . . .

THE POST-MORTEM LETTERS

by **JULIAN SYMONS**

Howard Carey had always been what he thought of as fastidious, and what his wife Ellen had once called downright prudish, in sexual matters, and at first he did not understand what the strange woman was saying to him.

He glanced at his watch, under the vague impression she had said something about the time. Then she repeated the suggestion in words that were unmistakable. He recoiled slightly, shook his head and walked on, but she moved on with him using obscenities, murmuring things that appalled him. He turned on her, ready to threaten her with the police, and saw under the street lamp that this was not a woman but a young girl.

She wore a white macintosh, had hair that under the light seemed a remarkable shade of reddish gold, and her features were delicate and pale. She could not be more than 16, was perhaps less. He would have liked to say to her that she should be at home, that she might contract a disease, half a dozen other things. In fact he only quickened his step and hurried away from her. "Too old, are you?" she shouted after him.

The encounter worried and upset him. This was suburban London, not the center of town where he knew that such things went on. They were no more than a couple of minutes from the Underground station, and less than ten minutes' walk from his home. He had read in the local paper about streetwalking and mugging, and about drivers who crawled along beside the curb trying to pick up women, but he had never truly believed in such things.

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How could any woman bring herself to say such things as the girl had suggested to him? He arrived home in a state of shock.

The house was called Mon Repos. It was one in a short road of exactly similar houses, all of which had names—names which included Eagle's Nest, Chez Nous, Everest, and Happy Landings. The houses had been built between the wars. They were red brick semidetached, with bow windows in the front covered by lace or net curtains. Variety was provided by the doors, which were in different colors, as well as by the house names.

A few bold spirits had replaced the wooden doors by glass ones with a design engraved on them. The Dempseys next door at Happy Landings had a glass door which showed mermaids rising from the waves. Howard and Ellen had discussed it at length. Ellen liked the design, but Howard thought it was vulgar.

Once indoors he felt a little better. It was reassuring to see the three-piece suite, with both chairs and sofa facing the television set, the nest of tables that was pulled out when friends came in for coffee, the prints of local scenes on the walls, the photograph of Rod and his wife Jean. Rod had been living in Canada for two years now and was doing very well in his job as some kind of engineer. There was more space out there, he said, more opportunity, you had a better life altogether. Perhaps he was right, perhaps they would go out and pay the visit they had often talked about.

He looked at his watch. Ellen might be home soon, or she might be another hour or two. She had worked for several years as secretary in a firm of solicitors and her chief, Mr. McIntyre, asked her to work late a couple of evenings a week. Howard himself, knowing this, had done some little jobs at the insurance firm where he was deputy subcontroller of the small Complaints Section. It had always been a source of gratification to Howard that they both worked in such sound occupations. He would not have liked it if Ellen had been employed in something rather doubtful, like an art gallery.

He went upstairs to wash his hands—that was how he thought of it, for he did not like to name his bodily necessities—and looked in the bathroom glass. It showed a lean face with thinning gray hair, lines on either side of the narrow nose, deepset gray-blue eyes, a thin mouth. The expression was anxious, as though he were expecting something unpleasant to happen.

"Too old, are you?" He was 53, Ellen six years younger. They

had married young, because Rod was on the way. The birth had been difficult. After it Ellen had not seemed to welcome his attentions for a while, and then—well, it had not been easy to make ends meet on his salary, and if he were frank he would have to say that it had always been in his mind that an unintended successor to Rod would be a financial disaster.

And then they had both been immensely occupied with Rod, with finding the money to send him to a good private day school and to University, so that it had seemed nothing else much mattered. Of course things had been a little easier financially after Ellen took a typing course and got a job, but by that time the habit had become set.

He became aware that he was still staring into the glass. In it he seemed to see a different world from the one in which Ellen and he played bridge sometimes with neighbors and went occasionally to local socials, in which he mowed the small lawn at the back once a week from spring to autumn, wound the grandfather clock in the hall every Sunday night, and never used any word with a sexual connotation or a swear word of any kind.

In that other world people spoke as the young girl with reddish gold hair had spoken to him, used every possible word and committed every possible action, first making themselves insensible by drugs or alcohol to the very idea of right or wrong. In the other world they would sneer at everything that was right, reasonable, and respectable.

He had a sudden vision of the girl standing in their living room with others of her kind and doing dirty things everywhere, not just breaking things up but making a trail of filth all around . . .

He closed his eyes and the vision became more vivid, opened them again and it had disappeared, leaving his own face looking anxiously into the glass. He went down to the kitchen and got himself biscuits and cheese. Ellen cooked in the evenings, but when she worked late he ate a hot lunch and had something light for supper. They never took food into the living room for fear of leaving crumbs, and he ate at the kitchen table while he read the evening paper.

The front-page story was about a pop star who was leaving England because taxes were too high. He was shown smiling, about to board a plane, with a girl on either arm. In the story below the picture he said that they were "two of his harem." Inside the paper there was a full-page story about a schoolgirl who had

killed herself because several others had been bullying her, forcing the girl to steal from her parents under threat of being tortured.

Howard went into the living room and turned on the TV. He enjoyed sports programs, a family drama, or anything historical, but tonight there seemed to be nothing but what were called thrillers, with people being hit on the head or shot. He watched one of them to pass the time, but did not care for it. At nine o'clock it occurred to him that Ellen was later than usual. Perhaps Mr. McIntyre had taken her to supper, which had happened occasionally when there was a lot of work to be done.

The bell rang just after ten o'clock. A policeman stood there, with sergeant's stripes on his arm.

"Mr. Carey? May I come in?"

"What is it?" His thoughts moved at once, for some reason, to the girl in the white macintosh.

"Your wife is Mrs. Ellen Carey? I am afraid I have some bad news. Best to sit down."

Howard sat in one of the armchairs, looking up at the sergeant, who had a dark-blue chin in need of a shave.

"Do you know a Mr. John McIntyre?"

"I have never met him, but yes, he is my wife's employer."

"Your wife was a passenger in Mr. McIntyre's car tonight when it was involved in an accident."

"Ellen's been hurt? She's in the hospital?"

"I said the news was bad, sir. The car came out of a side road and was hit broadside on by a lorry. We haven't got all the details of just how it happened. The lorry driver is in the hospital with concussion."

"And Ellen?"

"I'm sorry, sir. Both car passengers were killed outright."

Everybody was tremendously kind. Sergeant Stubbs (that was his name) had talked to Bill and Carol Dempsey at Happy Landings next door, and Howard spent the night there, and the next couple of days as well. Ellen's elder sister Norah, whom Howard had never much liked, came up from the country and stayed for nearly a week. At the office the manager, Mr. Langport, had called him in and had a long chat, which ended with the suggestion that Howard should take some time off.

"Go away somewhere, stay with relatives."

"I have no close relatives except my son in Canada. Otherwise only cousins."

"What about staying with one of them?"

Howard shook his head. "We haven't been in touch for years."

"Your wife's relatives then?"

"No, I don't think that would do." The thought of staying with Norah was not to be contemplated. "I think the best thing is to go on working."

"Very well. But if you change your mind and decide you'd like a few days off, just say the word."

Yes, kindness everywhere. And nobody kinder than Rod, who flew over for the inquest. Jean stayed behind because she was expecting. Rod had filled out since he left England and now seemed twice the size of his father. He stood in front of the gas fire in the living room and asked, "What are you going to do, dad?"

"Do? I don't know what you mean."

"What I mean is—" Rod gave it up and began again. "Why not come back with me? Jean would love to see you, and there's plenty of room."

No doubt that was so. He had seen photographs of Rod's home, which was said to be a ranch-style house, whatever that was, and it certainly looked much bigger than Mon Repos. He stayed silent while Rod elaborated the theme.

"Even the old skinflint where you work has said you ought to get away. If you come back with me you can look round and see how you like it. Then if you did, you could put this little place on the market—"

"You mean stay there, go to live in Canada? Give up my position in the firm?"

"Oh, come on, dad, you know you're just a dogsbody. I mean, that's why mum went to work, isn't it?" He went on hurriedly. "I know it was to pay for my education and all that. Maybe the firm has a branch out there and could transfer you. Or if they didn't, no need to worry, you could stay with us as long as you liked while you found a job."

Howard said stiffly, "Thank you, Rod. I appreciate the offer, but I couldn't possibly leave this house."

"Mon Repos? This stuffy little place? But, dad, don't you see things will be different for you now mum's gone? At least move out into a flat, something easier to manage—"

"That's enough, Rod. I'm sure you mean well, but I shouldn't

think of moving from here. It may be a stuffy little place, but it is where you were brought up."

That was the end of the discussion. After a week Rod flew back, and to his surprise Howard found that he was not sorry to see his son go. He wanted, more than anything, time to reflect and to be alone.

At the inquest what happened had been explained. The car had come out of a side turning on a curve and the driver's view of the road, which would have been poor anyway, had been obscured by a parked car. The lorry driver had probably been traveling faster than he should have been, but he could not have seen the car until it was too late to brake.

There was only one puzzling thing. The office was in the City, and the accident had taken place some miles away, in St. John's Wood. The point did not concern the coroner and was not mentioned at the inquest, but it worried Howard because he could not understand it. Ellen had said that if Mr. McIntyre took her out to eat it was always at somewhere near the office.

There seemed to be a conspiracy to prevent him from being alone. The Dempseys asked him in to supper once or twice a week and regularly for Sunday lunch; other neighbors dropped in for a chat; the vicar came round, and so did a member of the committee that ran the church socials, to ask if he could lend a hand with the next outing. His chief, Hebden, the subcontroller, with whom he had never been particularly friendly, surprised Howard by asking him to dinner. He accepted on the spur of the moment, but the evening was not a success. Hebden and he had little in common, and Mrs. Hebden kept referring to what she called his tragic loss, and said that she thought lorries should not be allowed on the same roads as cars. Howard left, determined not to accept another invitation.

He had to show determination in getting free of the Dempseys. Carol had taken to coming round almost every evening, bringing hot soup or a piece of jam tart. When she offered to sort through Ellen's clothes and give them to some good cause she favored, he said he would do it himself.

"But, Howard, that's foolish." The Dempseys were a little older than the Careys, but Carol dressed and acted younger than her years. She was a dumpy little woman who always wore bright clothes, which he disliked. "I mean, you're just making things more painful for yourself."

The clothes, Howard decided, were not the only things he disliked about Carol. She had a slightly lopsided nose that he found distasteful. "It's very kind of you, but I can do them."

"At least let me help. Two do these things so much more easily than one. I shouldn't pry into anything."

He found suddenly that his whole body was shaking. "What do you mean? What would there be to pry into, as you call it?"

"Nothing, Howard. I didn't mean—"

"Why do you want to stick your nose into my affairs?" As he spoke, the nose, with its small but decisive turn near the end, looked enormously enlarged and seemed to quiver with a life of its own.

"If that's your attitude I won't mention it again."

"And I don't want this stuff," he added.

Howard went to give back the bowl of fruit jelly she had brought in, but it slipped from his hands and fell to the floor, breaking the bowl. Carol said nothing, but walked out of the kitchen. Later he bought a replacement bowl and put it outside their back door. After that there were no more invitations to dinner, and no little dishes were brought in.

Nevertheless, Carol had been right in saying that he must do something about Ellen's clothes. He threw into the dustbin the pots of cosmetics, scent, and other things on her dressing table—she must have spent a lot of money on such stuff—but her dresses hung in the closet, and her other clothes were in a chest of drawers. He packed a suitcase full of them and took it down to the local Oxfam shop in the little Morris car they had had for years. That's that, he thought as he returned, and it's been done without any help from that sly-nosed bitch next door.

He was surprised to find himself thinking so coarsely.

On the next evening he found the letters.

There was one drawer in the chest that Ellen had always kept locked. It was her personal drawer, she said, and when he asked what she meant by that, she laughed and said that curiosity killed the cat. The key had been in her bag at the time of the accident and was returned to him after the inquest. When he turned it in the lock he expected to find little more than Ellen's jewelry, which she had told him she kept there.

The jewelry was there, the few inexpensive bits he had been able to afford, and other things too—a diamond ring, a pair of pearl earrings, what looked like a ruby necklace. He had never

seen them before. Had they belonged to Ellen's mother? The box containing the ring looked modern. There were other things that occasioned him no surprise, a photograph taken on their wedding day and pictures of Rod at school.

And there were the letters.

There were more than 20 of them, in their original envelopes, addressed to Mrs. Howard Carey. He remembered one of them arriving. Ellen had said it was from an old school friend, and he had said that she wrote a good firm hand. He had said nothing further, and he would never have thought of looking at her correspondence. But these letters were from no old school friend. They began "Dearest Ellen" or "Darling," and were signed "Mac." They told the story of a love affair. The first letter had been written several years before, the last less than three months ago.

Howard Carey was a methodical man. He sat down on the bed with the letters and read them in chronological order, so that he had the whole story. Mac of course was Mr. McIntyre, and it seemed that they had become lovers soon after she went to work for him. He was married, but his wife was hopelessly neurotic, in and out of mental institutions. The letters had been written when McIntyre had taken his wife away on holiday during short periods of recovery, and so had not seen Ellen for two or three weeks. The wife's illness made any thought of marriage impossible, but those evenings when she had been "working late" had been spent in his St. John's Wood apartment.

There were references to "the agony of parting" and "sending you back to that crusty dry old stick who thinks of you only as his housekeeper." And there were other remarks about Howard. "I cannot bear to think of you in his arms, but then from what you say he never holds you in them . . . You say that if you left him it would break his heart, but what makes you think he has one? He has never cared for you, does not know what love means." Then there were passages about "burning for you" and "longing for you," as well as explicit words and phrases about making love, words that reminded him of what had been said by the young girl in the street.

He took two of the pills prescribed for him by the doctor, but could not sleep. What had Ellen been like? He switched on the light and looked long and earnestly at the photograph beside the bed, trying to discover in the features of the woman he had known the slut who had entered McIntyre's bed. She was in her

forties. Did women have the desires mentioned in the letters at such an age?

When he turned off the light again, images rioted through his mind, and he saw Ellen happily shrieking obscenities. Then he must have slept because she appeared with extraordinary vividness before him, laughing and saying, "Of course I do it—with anybody except you." He woke crying out, and did not sleep again.

It was from this evening onward that Howard Carey felt he really understood the meaning of the world around him, and knew the purpose of his life. He did his work in the Complaints Department with reasonable efficiency, although Hebden told Mr. Langport that Carey hardly seemed to be there half of the time and in his opinion should be compelled to take some leave. The manager called Carey in for another chat, but saw nothing wrong. When he asked how things were going, Carey said very well, he was much clearer in his mind now. It was a slightly odd answer, but hardly justified sending a man on leave.

So Howard went on working, arriving and leaving punctually. He shopped at the local supermarket, mostly for foods that could be heated quickly. He washed up after eating, then used the vacuum cleaner, so that Mon Repos was scrupulously clean. After eating, washing up, and cleaning the house, he went for a long walk in the winter night. If while out walking he saw neighbors, like the Dempseys, he ignored them. His walk usually ended at one or the other local pub, where he drank half a pint of beer and looked keenly at the women who came in unaccompanied.

One evening a man told him that if he was looking for a bit of stuff, he'd find plenty at the Rising Sun. After that his walks ended there, but he did not find what he was looking for. He was accosted outside the pub a couple of times, but brusquely rejected the invitations made to him. Every night, after his return, he read the letters. He now knew several parts of them by heart.

He saw the knife on a night when the pavements and road gleamed with rain, a slanting rain that he trudged through with hat pulled down over his eyes. The knife was in the window of a seedy little shop, among shears, scissors, and nail clippers. It had a long thin blade narrowing to a point, so that it resembled a miniature sword, and it seemed to Howard that it glittered like a jewel among all the rubbish beside it. Beneath it was a label: "Stiletto-type blade, many uses."

The shop was closed when he came home in the evening, but he

bought the knife on the weekend.

"Very nice little job, sir," the man behind the counter said appreciatively. "Beautiful cutting edge. Clicks back into the handle too. On a spring." He demonstrated.

Howard held it with the point on his palm, moved it fractionally downward. A bead of blood showed.

"You have to be careful of that point, sir. I'll get you something."

"It doesn't matter." Howard dabbed with a handkerchief. "I'll take it."

When he returned from this expedition, the Dempseys were at their gate. He was passing them with a curt nod when Carol spoke.

"Horrible weather. Don't know when the winter's going to end. And you have to be out in it such a lot, don't you? We've seen you coming home once or twice."

They had been spying on him! He did not reply, simply glared. But she went on.

"Why not come in tomorrow for Sunday lunch? So long since we've seen you."

He muttered that he was too busy, had no time, and slammed his gate, leaving them staring after him.

After that he took the car out at nights and became one of the curb crawlers. He had seen their technique in his walks. They moved along, hardly ever at more than five miles an hour, stopping when they saw one or two girls together, sometimes flashing their lights. There would be a brief discussion. Then the girls might move away, or one—occasionally both—would get into the car, which speeded up as it drove off.

Now he did this himself. Girls came up and spoke to him, offering various "services" as they called it, none of which he accepted. After a few days he became known, and some of the rejected girls were annoyed. One abused him at the car window.

"What do yer bleedin' want, then? Know what you are, just a dirty old man wants to hear girls talk about it and that's all. You keep out of my way or I'll tell my feller. He'll do you over, I can tell you that."

After that he moved to another area a few streets away. One night a girl opened the car door and sat down beside him. A man came to the window grinning, and said, "You want little Joanna?"

"No. I didn't ask her to get in, I don't want her."

"That ain't what he said, is it, Joanna? You hurt my little girl's feelings, I don't like that, you better give her a fiver, show you don't mean it."

"I'll call the police."

The man came round to Howard's door, opened it, stuck his head inside, and said, "You won't call."

The knife was in Howard's pocket, but he dared not draw it. He gave the girl the money and drove away, pursued by raucous laughter.

In the end he found her by chance, in a place remote from the streetwalking area. He was driving down it when he saw ahead of him the white macintosh and the reddish gold hair. He pulled up beside her and opened the passenger door.

"Get in."

She looked doubtfully at him, then said, "No, thank you."

Of course she was nervous, it was off her beat. He leaned over, pulled her arm, jerked her into the car, closed the door, and drove off.

"What the hell are you doing?" she said.

He spoke rapidly. "Look, we met before and I said no then but I didn't mean it. Everybody wants it." His right hand was in his pocket, he had the knife out and open.

"I don't know what you're talking about. Just let me out."

"This is what everybody wants," he said. He leaned over and put in the knife. "Ellen," he said. "Hold me, Ellen."

She did not cry out, so he withdrew the knife and plunged it in again. Now she leaned over and, with a sigh, came to rest in his arms. He pulled up the car, and put an arm around her. They were under a street lamp and only now, as the blood from her white macintosh stained his hand, and the light showed her features clearly, a rather coarse face with a twisted nose strangely like Carol Dempsey's, did he realize that he had picked up the wrong girl.

"Q"

a **NEW** Rand counterspy story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Jeffery Rand, former head of the Department of Concealed Communications, known to his opposites throughout the world of espionage as the Double-C Man, is sent on a critical mission to Amman, Jordan. The operation is fraught with danger—threats of assassination; foreign agents; Russian, Iranian, and C.I.A. involvement. The prize? A mere list of 260 names.

It was a case that started as a simple assignment, but it quickly got out of hand and grew more complicated by the minute . . .

THE SPY WHO HAD A LIST

by **EDWARD D. HOCH**

He was packing the small suitcase when Leila awakened. "What is it?" she asked sleepily. "Is this the day we fly back to London?"

"No," Rand said. "It's only Tuesday. Look, I have to do a favor for Hastings. Stay here in Cairo and visit your friends. I'll be back in a day or two."

"But you're retired, Jeffery!"

"We know it but they don't seem to. I'm going to Amman." He bent and kissed her goodbye.

But he didn't tell her about Evase.

For men like Rangoon the threat of assassination was no more alarming than the prediction of a thunderstorm might be to the average New Yorker. He'd lived most of his 44 years in the Middle East, the child of mixed parents, and he'd come to love this land where life was cheap and death was sometimes sudden.

To most of his superiors and all the agents he recruited, Rangoon had no other name. He was an undercover agent in charge of certain C.I.A. operations in the Middle East, acting as recruiter and paymaster in situations where the regular embassy-attached

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agents would be ineffective. Rangoon had never met Jeffery Rand, retired head of a branch of British Intelligence called the Department of Concealed Communications, and in fact had never heard Rand's name until the business in Cairo. Rand and his wife, vacationing in the city, had become involved in a terrorist plot and an assassination attempt on Rangoon. At the last minute Rangoon had canceled plans to fly to Cairo, where a marksman with a rifle had been waiting at the airport. When they told him of the aborted attempt on his life he merely shrugged and went about his business.

Rangoon had been married once, to a lovely Eurasian girl named Evase who'd operated on the fringes of the intelligence community. She'd left him three years ago for an oil-rich Iranian who owned a Teheran hotel. Since then he took care not to become involved. The loss of Evase was the only real failure of his entire life, and he didn't want it repeated.

Rangoon saw her three days after he'd first heard Rand's name mentioned. He'd gone to the Amman airport to check on the possible arrival of a known Russian agent who was touring the Middle East. The agent wasn't on the plane from Teheran, but Evase was. Seeing her striding briskly down the corridor toward the baggage claim area, he felt the familiar emptiness deep inside him. God, she was beautiful—even more lovely than he remembered.

"Hello, Evase," he said quietly, catching up to her and matching her long-legged stride.

"Well! The old hawk is on the prowl! Are you Rangoon today, or someone else?"

"I'm Rangoon," he answered with a sigh. "I sometimes think I'll be Rangoon for the rest of my days."

She smiled at his quiet desperation. "At least the pay is good."

"And you? Are you enjoying your oil man with his hotel?"

"I will say that life with him is never dull."

"Not even in bed?" Rangoon asked. It was his turn to smile.

"Always the little dig, my dear ex-husband. You've lost none of your charm."

"And you've lost none of your beauty."

She bent to retrieve an expensive leather overnight bag from the luggage conveyer. "Thank you."

"Can I offer you a lift into the city? The taxis here are terribly overpriced."

She hesitated and glanced at the watch she wore on a golden bracelet. He knew it had been a wedding gift from the oil man. "All right," she decided suddenly. "I'll take you up on that."

"Good. I'll get the car and swing around for you."

Rangoon hurried across the parking lot to his three-year-old Saab. When he was still about 50 feet away, he pressed a remote control button in his pocket that started the car's engine. He'd found it to be a useful device in these days of bombs wired to the ignition. Rangoon took the threat of assassination lightly, but he still found certain countermeasures necessary.

When he pulled up at the baggage area, Evase slid easily into the front seat. "I see you still have the same car."

"It's only three years old. Hard to believe you haven't been gone longer than that."

"I expect you manage well enough without me."

"Not as well as I did with you," he answered truthfully. "Where do you wish to be dropped?"

"At the Hotel Jordan, if that's convenient."

"Certainly."

They chatted casually during the drive in from the airport, recalling old friends and times past. "How long will you be in Amman?" he asked as the hotel came into view.

"A few days, perhaps longer. I have some business here."

"Could we dine one night? Surely your husband would not object."

She laid a hand gently on his, where it gripped the steering wheel. "Phone me tomorrow. I really don't know what my schedule will be."

He dropped her in front of the hotel, where the doorman carried her bag inside. Watching her disappear through the revolving doors, he had a feeling their meeting had been somehow important to him.

Rangoon telephoned his contact at the American embassy to report that the expected Russian agent had not been aboard the plane from Teheran. To his surprise, the embassy man, Dwight Fuller, interrupted his circumspect message to say, "That doesn't matter now. Can you come by here this afternoon?"

"Where—the embassy?"

"Yes."

"Isn't that—?"

"I said it doesn't matter. Be here at four, will you?"

"All right," Rangoon said and hung up. There was something about Fuller's tone that annoyed him, but then he'd never felt friendly toward the man.

At four o'clock he went to the American embassy and was shown into Fuller's private office. The tall C.I.A. man regarded him for a moment and then sighed. "I'm sorry to have to tell you this, Rangoon. You may have heard rumors that the new director was cutting back agency personnel by dropping several hundred agents and analysts."

A cold chill ran down Rangoon's spine. He shifted uneasily in his chair. "We've all heard the rumors, of course."

"The agency is cutting you loose. I'm sorry about it."

"Me? I'd have thought I was pretty important to your operations in the Middle East. I'm a recruiter and paymaster in charge of half your—"

"I know all that. You have to realize the decision wasn't mine. People in certain areas had to be cut. In your case there was the recent assassination attempt—a sure sign that you're becoming too well known as an agency employee."

Rangoon moistened his lips. "How soon?"

"At once, though naturally you'll receive generous separation pay. The word just reached me this morning."

"I see." Rangoon sat for a moment staring at the wall before finally getting to his feet. "May I ask a favor?"

"Certainly."

"Can you put out the word that I've been cut? It might get some of these people off my neck."

"They'll know soon enough." Fuller held out his hand. "Good luck, Rangoon."

"I don't suppose that's my name any more."

"You'll always be Rangoon to me. It's been a pleasure working with you."

"What about my records?"

"I expect we've got everything of importance. You don't have anything at your apartment or on your person, do you?"

"No, of course not. But there's a safe-deposit box at the bank."

"I'll meet you tomorrow and we'll clean that out. No loose ends."

Rangoon finally accepted the hand that was offered. This was the end of it then.

Outside the embassy he still started the Saab's motor from 50 feet away. It was just from force of habit—he didn't suppose anyone would bother killing him now.

Evasé dined with her former husband the following evening, and she could tell at once that his mood was not good. For one thing, he had been drinking—something she'd never known him to do during the daytime. Seated opposite him in the dining room at the Hotel Jordan, she tried to get him to talk about it.

"What's troubling you? Is it just seeing me again? Does it bring back bad memories?"

"Of course not." He toyed with his glass, then said, "When we met yesterday at the airport you asked me if I was Rangoon, and I said I'd always be. That was wrong, it seems. I'm not Rangoon any longer."

Her eyes widened. "You've been sacked?"

"I suppose that's the word for it. The Americans are cutting back. A new director and all that. They seem to think I'm expendable. The chap I report to—Fuller—came with me to the bank this morning while I cleaned out the safe-deposit box."

"Poor dear! They don't know a good man when they have one."

"They said too many people knew me. They had to cut somewhere and I was the likely one."

"But you must know a great deal about their operations here."

"I know a great deal about the agents I was running, but they can be easily replaced. Dwight Fuller plans to recruit new men himself."

"And what about you? What will you do now?"

"The separation pay is good. By the time that runs out I shall have found something else, I expect."

She pondered a moment, tapping the glass with her fingernail. "I wonder . . . Hamid is always looking for good people."

"Your husband? I'd hardly want a job with him."

"No, no! This would be different. He recruits people for the government. Security specialists to guard our oil installations and to train secret police agents. There's a great deal of money in Iran, and the pay would be very good."

Rangoon stared hard at his former wife. "You seem to know a great deal about it. I thought Hamid was in the hotel business."

"He is, but in his country one gets to the top by cooperating with the government in certain matters. Hamid is in a position to

meet people and arrange for their recruitment much as an employment agency would."

"Or the C.I.A.," Rangoon reminded her. "I'll think about it."

For the first time she noticed the middle-aged man at a nearby table. He looked familiar to her, like someone she'd known very well a long time ago. He was close enough to overhear their conversation, so she shifted it to other topics, still trying to remember who he was. Presently she saw him pay his check and leave.

Rangoon ate lightly and made no effort to accompany her up to her room. He promised to phone the following day. She watched him depart and then took the elevator to the fifth floor. She unlocked the door and stepped inside, turning on the lights.

The man from downstairs was waiting for her, sitting casually in an armchair by the bed. As soon as she saw him again she remembered. "My God—Jeffery Rand! After all these years!"

Rand had studied Evase closely in the downstairs restaurant and seeing her now only confirmed his impression that she was more lovely than ever. "How long has it been?" he asked.

She leaned back against the closed door. "You'd been part of something called the calendar network, and I was barely out of college. Twenty years ago, I suppose. It was my first brush with espionage, the first time I ever slept with a spy."

"Funny, I've never thought of myself as anything but a civil servant. And now I'm even retired from that."

"What are you doing here? What do you want with me?"

"My old boss at British Intelligence heard that you'd flown here suddenly. I was in Cairo and he remembered I'd once known you. He asked me to come here as a favor."

"To him?"

"No, to the C.I.A., actually. It seems they've lost something and they think I might get it back for them."

"Why were you in Cairo?"

"I was there with my wife."

"I see."

"By coincidence I learned of a plot to assassinate your former husband. That was one reason Hastings thought I might follow through on this."

"With me?"

"He thinks—and I think—that you came here to recruit Ran-

goon for some sort of Iranian intelligence job."

"What does that have to do with the C.I.A.?"

"The new director of the agency recently dropped two hundred and sixty agents and analysts from the payroll. As you know, one of them was Rangoon. Three days ago the C.I.A. contacted British Intelligence and asked for help in recovering a top-secret document—a list of the agents being dismissed. You can understand the sensitivity and importance of such a list. Some of the men and women on it could be understandably bitter, and open to an approach by a foreign power."

"How does this concern me?" she asked. Rand had to admire her coolness under pressure.

"As I told you, I believe you came here to recruit your former husband. I overheard as much downstairs tonight. That means you are directly or indirectly in contact with the person who stole that list."

"A list of such value must be kept in Washington. How could it be stolen in the first place?"

"Apparently by someone with access to the C.I.A.'s master computer. A thief with inside knowledge could have picked up a telephone anywhere in the world, dialed the computer's special number, transmitted a series of coded instructions, and stolen that list of two hundred and sixty names."

"Over the telephone?"

Rand nodded. "Using a computer terminal at his end to type out the information. The master computer recorded the fact that someone gained access to the list, but not his identity. Needless to say, the C.I.A. has since moved all sensitive material into a separate computer for in-house use only—but the damage has been done."

"The ways of espionage are strange indeed."

"That's one reason I retired. It's become a war of machines."

"Then where do you think I fit in?"

"I was hoping you could tell me."

Evase shook her head. "Go back to your wife in Cairo, Rand. There is nothing for you here," she said pointedly.

"There has to be."

"No."

"Be careful, Evase. You're playing a dangerous game."

"Life is a dangerous game."

"And over too soon."

He left her and went back downstairs.

In the morning Rand sought out Rangoon and found the man eating breakfast at a small café near his apartment. He studied the credentials Rand showed him and then raised his eyes to take in the face that went with them.

"So you're Rand. I should have figured we'd meet sooner or later. That Cairo business—"

"You were lucky you didn't take that plane. The plan was to kill you at the Cairo airport."

"So I heard. But you rounded them all up?"

"The important ones."

Rangoon took a sip of tea. "They won't be so anxious to kill me now that I'm off the payroll."

"That's what I've come about, actually."

The tired eyes twinkled for an instant. "To offer me a job with British Intelligence?"

"I'm no longer with them myself. Sometimes it's well to know when to leave." Rand thought back over the events of the past year. "I know what you're going through now. After I retired I was approached by a private intelligence network that made quite a good offer for my services."

"That hasn't happened to me yet."

"Oh?" Rand smiled slightly. "I understand you've been offered some sort of job with the Iranian government."

"News travels fast." Rangoon finished his tea and stood up. "Did Evase tell you that?"

"She's a beautiful woman."

"She is that," he agreed. "How do you know her?"

"She did some work for us long ago, before you knew her."

"I see."

"Recruiting agents is something that's in your blood. You should know that. Evase was attracted to you, I suspect, because you were C.I.A. She left you for Hamid because he was playing for bigger stakes."

"You know all the names, don't you?"

"It's my business."

"Did you ever run agents for the British?"

Rand shook his head. "I sat in a stuffy little code room back in London."

They left the café and strolled down the street toward Ran-

goon's car. "What do you want from me, Rand?" he asked at last.

"The C.I.A. boys have lost a list. Two hundred and sixty names, and you're one of them."

"Too bad."

"If Evase tried to recruit you, she must have known you were being let go. She's my passport to the missing list."

"She didn't mention the job till I told her I'd been fired. I met her by accident at the airport where I was checking on a Russian for the embassy."

"She would have let you speak first, even if she knew. You must know the sort of woman she is."

Rangoon shrugged. "Clever, intelligent. And beautiful."

"You still love her?"

He turned his eyes toward Rand. "Doesn't everyone who's ever met her? Don't you, Rand?"

"I have a wife back in Cairo waiting for me."

"What's that got to do with it?" He paused and took a small metal box from his pocket. It was about the size of a pack of cigarettes and he pointed it at the battered Saab automobile about 50 feet ahead of them. Rand heard the engine turn over and start. "Handy gadget," Rangoon said, returning the device to his pocket.

"There are at least three other ways of booby-trapping a car," Rand pointed out, "besides the ignition. A time bomb in the fuel tank, a bomb set off by a radio signal, and a pressure bomb like a land mine beneath the driver's seat."

"Well, no one would want to kill me now."

"I hope not," Rand said.

He telephoned Leila back in Cairo and told her he'd have to stay an extra day. Then he went back to the hotel where Evase was staying. He found her in her room, packing her bag. She looked up, startled to see him enter. "Is there no security here? Can you come and go in my hotel room as you wish?"

"A passkey," Rand said, holding it up. "Are you leaving Amman?"

"Yes."

"Does that mean Rangoon has agreed to join you?"

Evase's face brightened into a smile. "It means my husband is standing behind you with a gun."

Rand turned slowly. A well-dressed man who could only have

been Hamid had emerged from the bathroom holding a small foreign automatic pointed at Rand's middle. "Well," Rand said, "I'm pleased to meet you at last. I've heard a great deal about you."

Hamid motioned with the automatic. "Please raise your hands above your head, Mr. Rand. I could shoot you dead as a sneak thief with no effort at all."

"Would the Shah approve of that?" Rand asked, but he raised his hands.

"What do you want with my wife?"

"We're old friends. You can ask her if you doubt me."

"Evasé?"

She moved toward him, stepping away from Rand. "Long ago, before I married Rangoon, I did some recruiting for him. Contact work, nothing more."

"He's British Intelligence?"

"Retired," Rand put in quickly.

Hamid shifted his attention from Evasé. "Then why are you here?"

"A favor for the Americans. They want their list back."

"I see." That was as close to an admission as Rand had received.

"They'll pay for it, if they can be assured it's the only copy," Rand said. "But only the original computer printout."

"You think I have it?"

"I don't believe in coincidences. The British had word Evasé was flying here to recruit her ex-husband. His name was on the list. She must have known. You must have known."

"How much are the Americans offering for it?"

"May I lower my hands while we discuss business?"

Hamid waved the pistol. "Certainly."

"The C.I.A. will pay one hundred thousand dollars for the list—twenty-five thousand at once, with three additional annual payments of twenty-five thousand if there is no evidence that a duplicate list exists."

Hamid shook his head. "That's too long. Fifty thousand now and fifty thousand in one year's time."

Rand shrugged. "I could ask them. It's not my money."

"Within a year these people will be known anyhow. They will have to find other work, and there will be legitimate recruitment for their services."

"You have a point," Rand admitted. "But you can understand

the Americans' concern at having a full list of the names floating around."

"Certainly."

"Do you have the list?"

Hamid shook his head. "We were supplied only with Rangoon's name, because of Evase's connection with him. Other portions of the list will be sold in other parts of the world."

Rand breathed a silent sigh of relief. At least the whole thing hadn't been delivered to the Russians. Not yet, anyhow. "Who is your contact? Who has it?"

"I can't tell you that."

"Can you put me in touch with him?"

"Perhaps."

"Do so, then. I can only stay another day in Amman."

"Where can I reach you this evening?"

Rand gave the name of his hotel. Then, with a final glance at Evase, he started for the door. "One other thing," she said. "Leave the passkey here."

"Certainly," Rand said, and tossed it on the bed.

The evening dragged on and he heard nothing from Hamid. He was beginning to think the entire operation was a failure when the telephone by his bed rang. He answered it and heard Evase's voice, low and terrified. "Rand, you must come! Hamid has been killed!"

"Are you at the hotel?"

"Yes."

"I'll be right over."

She opened the door just enough for him to squeeze through, and he saw at once that Hamid's body was on the bed. The blankets and spread were soaked through with blood from a stomach wound. "He made it back here," she told Rand. "But then he died. I didn't even have time to call a doctor."

"Who shot him?" Rand asked, bending to examine the wound.

"The person with the list, I suppose. Hamid went to meet him."

"I'm sorry about this. Somehow it seems to be my fault."

She shook her head, as if denying it. "Just get him out of here."

"I can't do that. You'll have to call the police and tell them what happened."

"I—"

"You must, Evase."

"All right."

"Don't lie to them. They can see the blood soaked into the bed. They'll know he didn't die at once."

Her eyes came up to meet his. "Do you think I'm lying to you? Do you think I killed him?"

"Of course not. Just do as I say. Have you been in touch with Rangoon tonight?"

"No."

"But you did come here to recruit him?"

She nodded. "They said he'd be at the airport."

As Rand left the hotel room she picked up the phone and called the police.

He drove through the narrow streets in his rented car and parked behind Rangoon's Saab in front of the ex-agent's apartment house. Rangoon answered the door cautiously, wearing wrinkled pajamas. "What is it, Rand? What do you want now?"

"Let me in. Evase's husband has been murdered."

Rangoon fell back as if stunned. "Did she—?"

"We don't know who killed him. He made it back to their hotel room and died on the bed without speaking. Look, this has gotten out of hand. I came here to do a simple job which is growing more complicated by the minute."

"What do you want from me?"

Rand spoke very carefully. "Set up a meeting for me with your contact at the American embassy."

"Dwight Fuller. What do you want him for?"

"You don't like him?"

"Hell, he's the man who fired me," Rangoon grumbled. "I know it came down from Washington, but Fuller's never liked me from the start. He's what's wrong with the whole agency these days."

"I want to see him. Tonight."

"You've got a plan to recover their list?"

"I hope so."

Rangoon produced a little address book. "I have his private number. Maybe I can reach him." He got Fuller on the phone and spoke swiftly but circumspectly. Even in Amman, Rand imagined, telephone lines could be tapped.

"Will he see us?"

Rangoon nodded. "At the embassy in a half hour."

On the way over, riding in Rangoon's little Saab, Rand felt the man grow increasingly nervous. When they parked a block from

the embassy, Rangoon sent Rand on ahead, promising to catch up in a few moments. "What was all that?" Rand asked when Rangoon rejoined him. He couldn't see what the man had been doing.

"Nothing. Unfinished business."

The marine guard had been advised of their arrival, and they passed into the entrance hall to find Dwight Fuller awaiting them. Though the hour was close to midnight, Rand noted that Fuller wore a business suit and necktie. "This way, gentlemen," he said, leading them into his small private office near the rear of the building.

Rangoon performed the introductions and then slumped into a chair he'd obviously used before. He seemed at home in the room, somehow more at home than the formal Mr. Fuller. "Well, Rand, what can I do for you?" the C.I.A. man asked.

"I'm doing someone a favor, actually. Negotiating for the return of a list of names."

"I see."

Rand leaned forward. "I don't think you see quite yet, Mr. Fuller. I believe you had a hand in the theft of those names, and I'm here to get them back."

"I? Don't be insane!" He started to rise from his chair.

"You may also have killed a man named Hamid tonight, when he approached you for the list."

Dwight Fuller sat down again. "I assume you have some proof of these wild charges you're making."

"Enough to satisfy me." Rand went on. "Evase came here specifically to recruit Rangoon, and she was told he'd be at the airport so their meeting could seem accidental. Therefore the person who sold them your name had to be the same person—or at least an associate—of whoever sent Rangoon to the airport. And that was you, wasn't it, Mr. Fuller? You asked Rangoon to check on the possible arrival of a Russian agent."

"I spotted Evase," Rangoon insisted. "She didn't find me."

"But she would have if you missed her. She had to establish contact before you were actually let go."

"All right," Fuller said with a smile. "If that's all there is, I can easily explain it. I was in touch with Hamid on another matter. I knew of his wife's prior marriage to Rangoon here, so I mentioned that the agency was dropping him. I thought Hamid might find something for him. Is there a law against helping a man find a job?"

But Rand was shaking his head. "I can't buy that, Fuller. Hamid and Evase were told days ago—in time to make plans for her to fly here from Teheran. But you only received the word from Washington just before you fired Rangoon. You had to have prior knowledge of those names in order to tip off Hamid. You got that prior knowledge by using your embassy's computer terminal to steal the list from the Washington computer."

Dwight Fuller took a deep breath. "How much will they give for it?" he asked suddenly.

"One hundred thousand, with assurances there are no copies."

"The Russians will give more."

"You've been in touch with them?"

"Rangoon's name was separate because I knew Hamid. The rest of the names will be sold in bulk."

"You'll be finished with the agency, you know," Rand said.

"I have to think of my old age."

"Don't we all?"

"What about the murder of Hamid?" Rangoon asked.

Fuller shrugged. "It was self-defense. I met him in the park near his hotel. He pulled a gun on me and demanded the list. Said he was going to sell it back to the Americans. We struggled and I shot him."

Rand shook his head again. "The money I offered would have been peanuts to Hamid. You'll have to come up with a better story than that."

"I don't need stories, Mr. Rand."

"Where's the list?"

"You are persistent, aren't you?"

"Look, this isn't my affair. If you want, I'll just report back to them that you have the list and refuse to turn it over."

"My life wouldn't be worth very much then, would it?"

Rand shrugged. "That's your problem."

Rangoon interrupted. "I think if Rand had the list back he'd be willing to let you get away."

"Away? Where?"

"If you were friendly with Hamid you must have contacts in Iran. That's as good a place as any. We both know the agency. They won't pursue you so long as you don't stir up trouble."

"Give up everything here?" Fuller asked, glancing around him.

"The killing of Hamid was serious business," Rand pointed out. "The police will want it solved."

"So will the police in Iran. That's hardly the place to flee," Fuller said.

"Go anywhere you want," Rand agreed. "But go. And leave me the list."

Fuller was thinking about it. He got up and walked to the window, staring out at the night. Finally he turned and asked, "You said one hundred thousand?"

"Correct. I have twenty-five thousand in my pocket now. You'll get the rest in a year's time if no duplicate lists turn up."

"And I can leave here?"

"You'll have until morning," Rand said, "before I file my report. There are midnight flights from the airport."

"I'm going upstairs to my room," he said. "I'll be right back."

He returned in five minutes, carrying the familiar sprocketed sheet torn from a computer printout roll. There was no way of knowing where he'd hidden it, though Rand noticed it had been rolled very tightly. The tubular leg of a chair, perhaps, or a hollow towel rack in the bathroom. "Here it is," he said simply.

Rand scanned the list of names and addresses. Two hundred and sixty men and women scattered across the globe from Washington to Amman to Moscow. He wondered what the Russians would pay for this. "All right." He folded the sheet and put it in his pocket, then passed the envelope of money to Fuller.

Rangoon tossed an ignition key onto the desk. "The embassy cars will be under guard this late at night. Take my Saab if you want, and leave it at the airport. It'll be easier than thinking up lies for the marine guards."

Fuller looked to Rand for reassurance. "You'll give me till morning?"

"Yes."

He picked up the key. "Thank you, Rangoon. I'll leave it in the airport parking lot."

They sat in the office after he'd gone, and presently Rand stood up. "Did I do the right thing, letting him go?"

"It's what I thought you'd do," Rangoon said. "I figured it out about the same time you did—and I made that suggestion about letting him get away because I knew it was the only way we'd ever get the list."

"He probably has a copy in his pocket right now," Rand observed gloomily.

"Probably."

When it came, the sound of the explosion seemed a great distance away. But Rand knew at once what it was. "Your car!"

Rangoon was already on his feet, heading for the door. "Somebody had another try at me, and blew up the wrong person!"

The embassy guards joined them as they ran down the block, toward the smoking ruins of Rangoon's Saab. A stream of burning gasoline lit the scene. "Not the wrong person," Rand said softly, so only Rangoon could hear. "That's why you stayed behind a few moments when we arrived. You had a bomb of your own and you attached it to the ignition."

Rangoon said nothing.

"You were awfully certain I'd let him go," Rand murmured.

The burning gasoline lit the smile on Rangoon's lips. "I helped encourage it, if you'll remember. This way there's no duplicate list to be sold, to the Russians or anyone else. And for the record, it was an accident. Everyone will know the bomb must have been meant for me."

As the flames died and a siren pulsed toward them out of the night, one of the marines tried to pull a body from the wreckage. "They're both dead," he called out.

Rand froze at the words.

It was Rangoon who saw Evase's body first, and uttered a cry of despair. Rand looked once and turned away. It was clear to him now. "Fuller didn't tell Hamid that your name was on the list," he said to Rangoon. "He told Evase directly. Hamid must have followed her here to see what she was up to, and when I offered him a deal on the list he went to see Fuller about it. Maybe he already knew that Evase and Fuller were lovers."

Rangoon was leaning against a lamppost. He gasped for breath and said, "Fuller killed Hamid so he could have her. That was his real motive."

Rand nodded. "And tonight, when he went up to his room for the list, he must have phoned her to meet him. She was waiting outside the embassy just now, to fly away with him."

"And I killed her, Rand! I killed her and I still loved her!"

"Maybe I did too."

Leila was waiting for Rand at the Cairo airport. "Is it finally time to go back to England?" she asked.

"It's time," he said.

But once more he didn't tell her about Evase.

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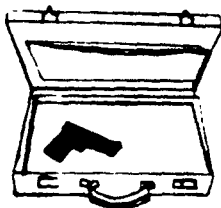
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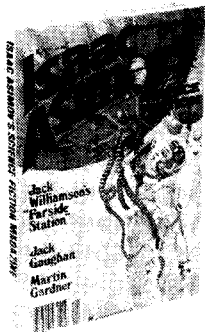
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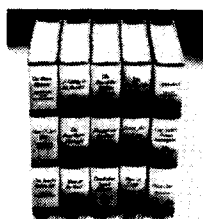
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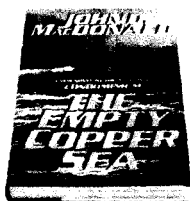
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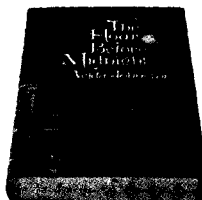
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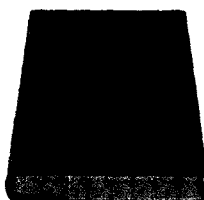
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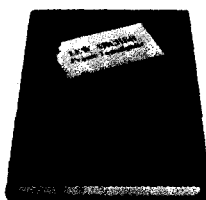
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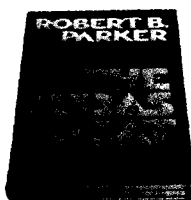
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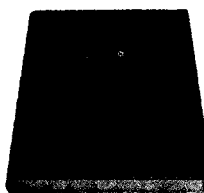
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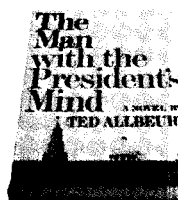
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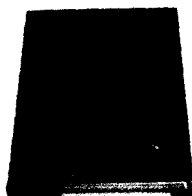
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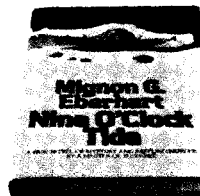
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